

HEGEL'S SYSTEMATIC CONTINGENCY

John W. Burbidge



Hegel's Systematic Contingency

Also by John W. Burbidge

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John W. Burbidge

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In memoriam
Emil L. Fackenheim
1916–2003

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Preface

David Morris's comment was perceptive: the development of this book provides an instance of the thesis it argues. Papers were written in response to contingent demands and for particular occasions. Then, in the spring of 2003, Jay Lampert asked me to lead off a session on the theme of contingency with Hegelians from Ontario and Quebec. As I prepared that talk (which I titled "Systematic Contingency"!), I realized that almost all of my work on Hegel had revolved around this theme.

It started, I suppose, from working on my dissertation with Emil Fackenheim. It was he who drew my attention to the critical paper by Dieter Henrich, "Hegels Theorie über den Zufall."¹ And the role of contingency was an underlying motif of my doctoral dissertation: "Contingent Truths of Historical Fact and Eternal Truths of Reason: The Challenge of Lessing's 'Ditch' and the Responses of Hegel and Schelling" (University of Toronto, 1970).² The papers which have served as the raw material for this study started appearing in print about a decade later, and have continued until the present day. I appreciate the willingness of editors and publishers to allow them to be reused here.

None of these papers are reproduced here in their original form. Rather than simply collecting an anthology of previous publications, I have reworked them extensively so that they would fit into the argument of this book, showing the necessity that binds them together and revealing the underlying system that required their original contingent appearance. Some connecting links, however, were composed specifically to complete this pattern.

It was only after I had finished putting all of this together that I came upon Bernard Mabille's book *Hegel: L'Épreuve de la Contingence*.³ He is far more systematic than I in showing the role contingency plays in every part of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* and beyond. It was encouraging to discover how much we agreed in tracing its importance. We differ in where we locate the central engine that generates the whole dynamic. Mabille is much more onto-logical: "(With Hegel) the proof of contingency is concentrated in the experience of being as determination or thesis [Mabille uses this latter term in the Greek sense of something put forward or set down]. The significations he brings to light in each sphere of what is, and the difficulties (aporiae) that they introduce, implicate this ontological figure of being a thesis: natural

exteriority, structure of “data” (which designates the contingency of the object found by consciousness), the contingency of what is posited (found in those works of spirit where it no longer recognizes itself), contingency of the thetic focal point of the now or even of the sick organ which becomes rigid and flees from the fluidity of the organism. However, although Hegel collects together this comprehension of being as a positing or *positio*, this is not to enclose himself therein. He confronts it not to rediscover the pure act of being under the Kantian neutralised existence, nor to simply reject this comprehension of being as thesis, but to make of the thetic a moment of the Absolute’s deployment as liberty”.⁴ In contrast I stress the central significance of logical method. Though the two approaches are not strictly incompatible, they do draw different implications for the practice of philosophy. This is why I have not felt the necessity to incorporate references to Mabille in the body of the present discussion.

The dedication of this volume records my debt to Emil Fackenheim, both as an undergraduate teacher inspiring me with a vision of rigorous philosophy struggling with real, existential dilemmas, and as the director of my dissertation, always challenging me to do a better and more thorough job. At the same time I should record my debt to the community of scholars in Ontario and Quebec that, over the years, has provided an encouraging and stimulating environment for discussing Hegelian themes – originally in the Hegel Translation Group that gathered at Trinity College, Toronto to translate Hegel’s *Jena Logic and Metaphysics*,⁵ but more recently in the annual gatherings initiated by Jay Lampert, and continued by many others, including John Russon, Jamie Crooks, Graeme Nicholson, David Morris, Jeffery Reid and Bruce Gilbert. Several parts of the ensuing chapters were first given an airing in their sessions and the whole project was inspired by the discussions that ensued.

In the endnotes, I refer to the German of the Critical Edition: G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1968ff). For English translations I shall cite:

Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, tr. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

Hegel’s Science of Logic, tr. A.V. Miller (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969).

G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, tr. T.F. Geraats, W.A. Suchting, H.S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991).

Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature, tr. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970).

Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind, tr. W. Wallace & A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971). All other references will be given in full.

1

Philosophy and History

Plato's *Republic* has much to answer for.¹ The threefold hierarchy that structures not only the soul of individual humans, but also the political order, places reason and reflective intelligence at the top. Only when it governs both the noble passions and the more vulgar appetites do we have a virtuous life. Aristotle goes even further and ascribes to such a life the quality of happiness: a life lived in accordance with our nature. To be sure, Aristotle distinguishes the theoretical reason that seeks to satisfy curiosity from the practical reason that governs the passions, but it is still reason that moderates our emotions so that we do not lose ourselves in excess. Reason (as Plato's image in the *Phaedrus* puts it) holds the reins that check the impetuous steeds drawing our chariot.

Such an approach has become common wisdom. The best course, we say, is to govern the passions using dispassionate reflection. Reason is to govern the world.

What is significant about this is not the way it has been applied to the life of individuals. We all know those who have been driven by their appetites, and we have known those who have been driven by their passions; and in both cases we have noticed how their lives have resembled a roller-coaster mounting to moments of ecstasy and descending to hours of despair. Those who are genuinely content with their lives over a period of years are those who have adopted a stance of reflective distance from the more elemental drives and ordered them into a coherent whole. These are they who have found genuine happiness.

The critical move happens, however, when Plato applies this structure to the political order. Philosophers are to be kings. And kings are to be philosophers. That is to say, the decisions that structure and mould a city, a state or a nation, are to distance themselves from the immediate

reactions of passion and needs and are then to organize them all into a ordered whole. Reason is to determine the constitution of the state. Once that is done, the passions and the appetites will be assigned proper spheres for their deployment.

Yet there is a flaw in the ointment. For when, in the *Republic*, Plato moves from the prescriptions of reason to drawing out his a priori view of history, he shows that reason does not – indeed (he suggests) cannot – maintain dominance. For the passionate rebel against the restraints put upon them. In due course the appetites cry out for their rights. And the city falls into chaos. While reason rules in the ideal state, the passions and appetites determine the way history develops. And this marks the decline and fall of the human polis. All history is a falling away from the golden age.

The Enlightenment turned things around. For them, the past had been the period where passion and the appetites reigned. Crafty aristocrats and sly priests exploited the appetites of the masses to satisfy their own interests. The result was oppression and superstition. “Écrasez l’infâme!” cried Voltaire. For him and his colleagues the goal was to put reason back in control, to create a society where decisions are made according to what reason tells us ought to be done. It was Kant who articulated this most explicitly. History is the sphere where passions and interests dominate, the ultimate goal is to create a society where, as much as possible, decisions are taken according to that criterion of rational morality, the categorical imperative. And whenever we act morally, we must ignore – indeed at times it seems that we must do the exact opposite of – whatever our passions and appetites move us to do. In his more optimistic moments Kant thought that it was possible for us to move toward a society where this became the norm. For the Enlightenment, unlike Plato, then, history was a sphere where reason would progressively become more dominant. Humans would progress toward more enlightened, that is, more reasonable, societies. And reason would come to rule the passions and bring about Plato’s ideal state.

It is a shock, then, to come upon Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of world history: not only the notes taken down by his students, but even the manuscript he wrote out for the winter semester of 1830–1, in the last year of his life. To be sure he gives due attention to our desire for happiness; and he acknowledges that a moral life is one in which the passions and the appetites are organized into a coherent pattern by reflective thought. One achieves this, he says, by recognizing one’s station in life. Morality is not a question of fitting one’s actions to some abstract and ideal standard, but in taking up the concrete demands that

are placed upon us where we live, in fitting our interests and desires into the possibilities and expectations provided by our setting.

But when it comes to history he throws all that aside. Periods of happiness, he says, are periods where, historically, nothing significant happens. All the efforts that we introduce to make the world fit with what ought to be fail. What makes history work are the passions, our interests, those times when we forget ourselves because we become totally committed to a cause, leaving all caution behind.

Some individuals follow these passionate drives, then find that their actions evoke an echo in many others who are equally restless. These latter congregate to the cause, and the established order cracks and breaks, opening up the possibility of a new order that up to then has never even been anticipated. The agents of this change do not really know what they are doing. They do not anticipate what actually results. For the events that emerge extend far beyond the limited intention contained in the original passionate act.

Here is no purposive development, organizing events to produce an order that matches what reason tells us ought to be. Reason works with universals, not simply the abstract universals of moral laws, but also the concrete universals where many components are fitted into a coherent whole. Passions, however, and the actions of human will are particulars, focused on a single determinate condition to be eliminated, on a single specific goal to be achieved, and ignoring all those complicating conditions that lead events far beyond anything anticipated. Indeed there is no way of knowing what will happen once we introduce these radically new events into the turbulent cauldron of human affairs.

Paradoxically, even as he is telling us that history is the realm of the passions, where happiness is the least of considerations, Hegel also says that "reason rules the world." Recall his aphorism in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*: "What is rational is actual, and what is actual is rational." Such claims do not seem to fit with what we have just been saying. How can Hegel, the rationalist *par excellence*, say that history is – and ought to be – the arena of the passions? That wherever a rationally coherent political order produces happiness and virtue, nothing significant happens?

It is not surprising that he has to introduce something like the cunning of reason:

The particular interests of passion cannot be separated from the realization of the universal; for the universal arises out of the particular and determinate and its negation. The particular has its own interests

in world history; it is of a finite nature, and as such, it must perish. Particular interests contend with one another, and some are destroyed in the process. But it is from this very conflict and destruction of particular things that the universal emerges, and remains unscathed in itself. For it is not the universal Idea which enters into opposition, conflict and danger; it keeps itself in the background, untouched and unharmed, sending forth the particular interests of passion to fight and wear themselves out in its stead. It is what we may call the cunning of reason that it sets the passions to work in its service, so that the agents by which it gives itself existence must pay the penalty and suffer the loss.²

For that phrase, “the cunning of reason,” we are not confined to the fallible reporting of Hegel’s students. It is found elsewhere. Indeed I suspect that Hegel introduced it into his lectures at this point because it was the most appropriate term to express what he wanted to say. Reason rules the world, and yet reason is not evident in the way actual history develops, with its play of particular passions. So Hegel has to appeal to a critical discussion found under the concept of teleology. It is there, in his logic, that he spells out what is involved in the phrase: the cunning of reason.

Consider this passage from the larger *Logic*:

That the end posits itself in a *mediate* relation with the object, and *interposes* another object *between* itself and it, may be regarded as the *cunning* of reason. The finitude of rationality has, as remarked, this side, that the end enters into relationship with the presupposition, that is, with the externality of the object. In the *immediate relation* to the object, it would itself enter into the sphere of mechanism or chemism and thereby be subject to contingency and the loss of its determination as the Concept that is in and for itself. But as it is, it puts forward an object as means, allows it to wear itself out in its stead, exposes it to attrition and shields itself behind it from mechanical violence.³

We find a similar claim at the same point in the 1830 *Encyclopaedia*:

The fact that the subjective purpose, as the power over these processes (in which the *objective* gets used up through mutual friction and sublates itself), keeps itself *outside of them* and *preserves itself* in them is the *cunning* of reason.⁴

And then there is his comment on this paragraph in the 1831 lectures:

Activity is turned against the object, but only by means of the means; and with this object the activity turns itself against another object, let us call it the *material*. What are objective come into conflict with each other: that is the cunning of reason, the end in view.⁵

As far as I know, these are the only places in Hegel's corpus where the phrase "cunning of reason" appears, though we do find him introducing "the cunning of the concept" into his revision of the chapter on Measure in 1831 at the point where a change in quantitative ratio produces a radical alteration of quality.

What is interesting about these key passages from the *Lectures on World History* and from the two *Logics* is the recurrence of another phrase. This similarity is lost in translation, however, for our translators have adopted different conventions. Let me remind you what they wrote. In Nisbet we have: "The particular interests of the passions fight and *wear themselves out*." In Miller, reason "exposes the means to *attrition*," while from Geraets and his colleagues we have: "*mutual friction*." All these English expressions translate either the German verb, *sich abreiben*, or its cognate, *die Aufreibung*. The English terms that most closely capture its sense would be "abrade" or "abrasion," perhaps even "chafe." While the *Lectures on the Logic* of 1831 omit this phrase, it does talk of objects coming into conflict with each other. The image that comes to mind in all four passages is that of stones on a wind-beaten shore grating against each other until all awkward edges are rubbed away and smooth circles emerge.

The term "abrasion" throws light on how Hegel sees the passions contributing to the reign of reason in world history. For Plato and the tradition, the passions are to be kept in check by a dominant reason. For Hegel, instead, the passions are let loose to work out their destiny. Because each passion captures a particular interest it is partial, in both senses: it takes sides, and it does not consider the whole picture. And that partiality leads it headlong into conflict with other particular passions. Our actions never accomplish what we will because they have to struggle with the interests of others. Because we are passionately committed to our causes, we do not surrender, but wage war with each other, struggling for a dominance that is never achieved. In the process we are worn down until, together with our opponents, we find a *modus vivendi*, a way in which all of us can find satisfaction, even if our primary purposes have been frustrated.

The universal structures of social intercourse, then, are not the products of social planning, says Hegel. They emerge from the struggles of the participants: between the landed gentry and the agents of commerce; between workers and management; between Francophone and Anglophone; between parents and teenagers; between analytic and continental; between suburb and inner city; between fundamentalism and secularism. Out of these struggles emerge the conventions and customs by which humans create great societies.

It is tempting to think of the traditions and customs that mould our daily life as restrictions on our freedom. They certainly serve to hold our passions in check. What we forget is that they are the result of having allowed the passions free play, of having them rub against each other until they became worn out. They are the result of abrasion. It is because these customs are petrified passions that Hegel can say that we discover our genuine freedom only when we act as members of a structured society. To be sure, we are free when we can do whatever we want. But if such action does not accomplish our interests, then such freedom is faulty. By working within the petrified passions of convention we are able to act, and develop our interests, in a way that can accomplish what we have in mind. We achieve our destiny when we accept our station and perform the duties that it imposes.

And so we move toward happiness, toward the end of history.

But ... passion is not so easily disposed of. We continue to be individuals with our particular interests. The resolutions of past conflict oppress and confine us. We become restless.

At one level that is all part of the bubbling current of social life – the contingencies and the insignificant details which disappear from view as time moves on. Then, at another level, someone comes along who is not content to fit into the status quo, who sees very clearly the failures and the inadequacies of the current state of affairs, and who is moved to act. Passion erupts in the committed action of the few who are grasped by the demands of the age; and whose station places them at a critical juncture. They plunge forward, threatening the fragile stability of the social order. Where that happens, and where their passionate acts articulate the unexpressed restlessness of many others, history is ruptured. The comfortable social order is recognized as one-sided, needing correction. But correction does not come piecemeal. Order shatters in revolutionary turmoil. Rebellion evokes resistance and counter attack. Even if the challenge is ultimately defeated, the future will never be like the past. For the new social order will have built into its fabric new conventions that do justice to those passions worn out in the struggle.

For Hegel the world-historical individuals are great military figures: Alexander and Caesar from the past, Napoleon, his contemporary. What marks them out is not simply the fact that they act with powerful passion, ignoring the counsels of reason. It is that they bring to expression a restlessness with the status quo that is fermenting throughout society. Others flock to their banner. George W. Bush is re-elected with a larger majority; Osama bin Laden has no difficulty in recruiting suicide bombers. What was supposed to be the end of history, with the triumph of liberal capitalism, turns into an arena of violent struggle where the outcome is in no way secure.

Indeed more contingencies come into play than just our human passions. For our modern social conventions have required the exploitation of nature. And nature is turning out to be no anodyne plastic amenable to being maneuvered in whatever way we please. It, too, has its passions, which at times erupt in raging storms, earthquakes, tempests and floods, sandstorms, plague and famine. These may expand to overwhelm our most concerted efforts to keep them under control. And the consequences leave their traces on all human society.

The central role of abrasion in Hegel's teleology and philosophy of history has some significant philosophical consequences, in particular, with what we mean when we talk of reason and things being rational. We are all products of Plato and Kant. The rational is the ideal, the universal in which all the particularities and distortions of passion and appetite are given their proper place. What is rational is whatever produces good results, and does so using appropriate means. It is a structure of harmony, where everything fits together into the idea of the good, or the life where virtue and happiness are integrated. Even when we do not consciously call on these intellectual predecessors, we nonetheless think of the rational as a standard that avoids whatever will produce harm.

But this is not what Hegel has in mind. Over and over again he stresses the critical role of the negative – of that which contradicts, challenges, disrupts and destroys. Reason works with cunning, for it not only brings about something universal, but it does so by allowing the particular and the idiosyncratic to have free play. And whenever the particular stakes its claim, the overarching generality of the universal is put in question. So reason requires and uses the irrationality of the passions. What is rational emerges as the way this irrationality has found of producing a comprehensive picture, an achievement which is itself destined to be disrupted once again by reactions of passionate force.

So Hegel's universal is not an abstract generality. It is a complex totality, incorporating a rich diversity of different elements into a coherent and

integrated whole. And its universality is diminished if that diversity is diminished, if particularity becomes repressed or silent. Hegel's universal requires conflict and struggle, in which particulars differentiate themselves from each other and from the whole.

Early in his career Hegel suggested using the catchphrase "the identity of identity and non-identity" as a slogan for philosophical reason. The critical point to notice about that phrase is that the first "identity" is not the same as the second. He does not say, for example, "the identity of non-identity." Rather, reason requires *both* identity and non-identity – one as much as the other, and both must be part of the single picture: universal and particular; agreement and conflict; happiness and despair. No Manichaeism for him.

If "universal reason" has its own distinctive sense for Hegel, so does the related term "necessary." When Hegel talks about the course of history being necessary, or that nature follows necessarily from pure thought, it sounds to those of us trained in the traditions of philosophy as if he is talking about deduction. If we know what goes before we can derive through thought alone whatever must follow. Nothing happens contingently, where the opposite could just as easily have taken place. So on this reading Hegel's metaphysics becomes a huge a priori system in which thought derives one feature after another in a deductive and derivative way.

But if passions are the necessary means that reason uses, whether in history, or nature – indeed if particularity is a central ingredient of all universals, whether theoretical or practical – then necessity cannot ignore contingency. To be sure we can identify how a set of conditions requires some ensuing result. And if we limit the range of conditions and control each one, we can ensure that what we want to achieve will in fact take place. So there is a kind of relative necessity. But that happens seldom: perhaps in the rigorously controlled experiments of the laboratory, but hardly ever in the rough and tumble of daily life. Chance conditions contribute to significant developments just as much as those that are planned.

It is a contingent matter whether all the conditions conspire to come together at exactly the same point and time. Indeed, once we consider how the world functions, we realize that such contingencies are necessary. Frequently they are reactions to the prevailing norm, the prevailing totality. They introduce disruptions which are defined more by what they are not, than by what they are. At the same time, by challenging the previous universality they reduce it to being just one particular among many. So this, too, has its positive value transformed into something

negative. Any positive significance only becomes apparent as time progresses, and even that positive contribution develops not by way of some omniscient mediator, but only because the particularities wear each other down. This is what is really necessary: this dynamic process where contingencies emerge to disrupt totalities, introducing abrasion. The resulting new universality cannot be anticipated, for it will emerge only from the conflict. Yet it will, in Hegel's final sense, be necessary as the end result of the contingent processes. Such necessity can never be deduced *a priori* from known prior conditions.

How seldom, in all the voluminous literature on Hegel that has exploded since John Findlay's *Hegel: A Re-Examination*, has this understanding of Hegel's rationalism been acknowledged.⁶ How often has Hegel been appropriated into our conventional understanding of rationality, of universality, of necessity. How silent has the literature been on the disruptive power of the negative. Certainly one does find it – particularly in certain Marxist schools. The disciples of Raya Dunayevskaya continue to stress the critical role of the negative and the particular in Hegel.⁷ But their influence is muted.

It is the purpose of this study to show how radically different is Hegel's approach to the traditional problems of philosophy because he takes the contingencies of history seriously – because, as he said in his lectures, “the universal arises out of the particular and determinate and its negation.” But this approach is not a peculiarity of Hegel's own brand of philosophy. For whenever we take history seriously, we have to radically transform what we mean by philosophy.⁸ Classical metaphysics and a respect for history are not compatible.

As we have seen, history is important for Hegel. Not only did he lecture on the philosophy of world history, not only did his lectures on art, religion and philosophy adopt a historical sequence, but his first major work – the one that sets the parameters for his system – follows a quasi-historical path in which consciousness and self-consciousness learn from the contingencies of experience. For the first time in the history of philosophy, he has placed historical development at the heart of systematic thought. It is this initiative which requires a quite different approach to the fundamentals of philosophy.

This strong claim will be defended in the rest of this work. However, it will not come amiss if we start by considering our more general thesis: *whenever* we take history seriously our thinking must run directly counter to the approaches of classical metaphysics. It is not just a matter of having one or other feature in the first incompatible with some accidental result of the second. Rather, the critical characteristic by which an individual

or event becomes historically significant is trivial and unimportant in the study of being *qua* being. And what metaphysics takes as normative is quite irrelevant to a theory of history.

When we make history primary, we reject the maxim of Dionysius of Halicarnasus that "history is philosophy teaching by examples." What happens is not simply an instance of a general rule or law of human behavior. Rational principles do not determine the order of things. A single action, whether by an individual, a political institution or any social group, is decisive. Into a situation formed by the past, the agent introduces something new. Various constraints are confronted and transformed by a distinctive and singular happening. To decipher what is significant about that event, we dare not ignore the novelty that the action achieves. It is unique *both* in terms of the specific setting in which it takes place *and* in terms of its decisive initiative. What makes the action significant for history, therefore, is its unique particularity.

No historical action simply repeats present or past conventions. For even the intention to copy is itself a new feature, and the interaction of a later act with the setting produced by an earlier one results in novel consequences. Each historical action is a novel singular.

This has, however, an important implication. Not only is there no precedent that anticipates any particular event, but any reflection on its significance starts by taking note of the way it *differs* from what has gone on before. Before it happened, that novelty was not even entertained as a possibility. Although the connections and similarities between the action and its prior setting may be noticed once it has taken place, prior to its emergence there was nothing in the preceding conditions that would enable thought to predict that things would happen in just this peculiar way. Any process of anticipating such a result would need to appeal to some general principle or rule; yet the uniqueness of the historical action rules out the presence of any such principle.

To characterize this feature of historical action I shall adopt the terms "actual" and "possible," not in Aristotle's sense, but in one suggested by Kant.⁹ An actual is something singular that occurs temporally – an event or an action. A possibility, on the other hand, is something general – a principle that is thought, a condition that is in some general way connected to its consequent. In this sense, an actual is unique and individual; it happens in time and is simply a point of reference. A possible, on the other hand, is general and universal. It can be instantiated in time, but its intension extends further than this one instantiation.

Using this vocabulary, we can say that a historical action shows itself to be, after the fact, possible. But prior to its occurrence there was no

possibility that could point toward its decisive uniqueness. Any possibility came into existence at the moment the action happened. It had no ontological status – even in the mind – independent of that actuality. In other words, something general and universal has a beginning in time. And that beginning is brought about by something unique and individual.

Once the historical event occurs, the actual features of its determinate setting can be recognized as constituents of its uniqueness – it is distinctively connected to them. But prior to its coming to be, there was no possibility that served as a *sufficient condition* – no prerequisite that in general restricts or defines what the action *is going to be* in that setting.

This is to say that it is the action itself that generates possibilities. These emerge as reflection considers what has happened. In thought the novelty is brought together with other actuals: its setting, previous actualities that are remembered, new actions that respond to its partiality. This synthesis is an operation of generality – looking at two or more terms within a single context. In this perspective similarities and likenesses may be noted, and differences may be explicitly demarcated. Reflective thinking, using the resources of possibility, thus brings to consciousness the uniqueness of the action; but it does so by a process of drawing analogies – by noting similarities and differences, and then categorizing the relations between like and unlike. In this way the synthesis of reflection does not simply gather a historical diversity into an indiscriminate collection. The individual actions are ordered into patterns or configurations, their peculiar features are interlocked, and they are seen to modify each other. By moving from mere reflection to comprehension or understanding, the synthesis is integrated into a single perspective. This general or universal framework organizes a network of unique actions. Building on reflection, comprehensive thought articulates the disjunctive difference of each individual while articulating their reciprocal interaction within a totality. This structure of possibility is the goal of understanding: by fitting a number of unique singulars together it achieves an integrated individuality.

While historical actions are actual, reflection and comprehension occur in the realm of thought – of possibility. They become actual, however, in speech, action and behavior, for speech reproduces in the public forum the generality of thought. Through language each individual's reflective response to historical action comes to be challenged by those of others. Since the range of the synthesis and the configuration of consistency may vary for different reflecting individuals, one actuality may initiate a number of possibilities. These interact in the sphere of public

discourse, producing a new level of inconsistency that demands resolution. The debate never reaches consensus. Not only does a surd remain in the diversity of reflective syntheses and comprehensive explanations. The ongoing flow of time also introduces uniquely new actions into the forum where the debate occurs. That forum we call tradition, for it carries the past over into the present and future.

Let me summarize. History involves a dynamic relation in which unique actions, actual in time, evoke reflection; and in which the quest for comprehensive or general consistency provides the context into which unrepeatable actions introduce their novelty. Because the reflective tradition is in principle prevented from becoming fully comprehensive, it expects to be surprised. Not only can it never articulate possibilities that exhaustively characterize subsequent historical acts and events, but it is precisely the unanticipated in the future that becomes historically significant.

To this point I have been developing a general story, even though each tradition will have its own distinctive character. I have recounted a sequence from unique actuality to general possible that abstracts the similarities of various traditions from their distinctive integrating dynamic. That done, I can suggest a feature that is common to all. What distinguishes a theory that takes history seriously is that, within its purview, singular actuals as novel and unique initiate general possibilities. These possibles as universals are not considered to be necessary prior conditions, underlying what is ultimately significant in the actual as individual. Rather, singular actuals provide the necessary condition for the universals generated through reflection and debate. Prior to an action, these general possibilities have no status at all. What uniquely happens is created – coming to be, as it were, out of nothing.

I now turn to the general feature that characterizes the contrary position of classical philosophy. While there is a great variety of schools, we shall nonetheless find enough common ground to identify the radical tension between traditional metaphysics and historicity.

Classical philosophy is no less the product of reflection; but its focus is not directed toward an open-ended integration of unique, temporally distinct individuals. It seeks, instead, those aspects of reality that are in some way universal and necessary. Descriptive metaphysics, writes Strawson, aims “to lay bare the *most general* features of our conceptual structure.”¹⁰ For Whitehead, “speculative philosophy is the endeavor to frame a coherent, logical, *necessary* system of *general* ideas in terms of which *every* element of our experience can be interpreted.”¹¹ And Aristotle says that “the characteristic of knowing all things must belong to him

who has in the highest degree *universal* knowledge; for he knows in a sense all the instances that fall under the universal."¹²

Let me suggest what this involves. In its investigation, classical philosophy, no less than the view that takes history seriously, starts from what is temporally actual. But the goal of reflection is to *discover* those conditions which were already there. What was required for this event to come to be? What made it possible? These prerequisites are not themselves understood to be simply contingent, actual events. "The proper object of unqualified scientific knowledge," writes Aristotle, "is something that cannot be other than it is."¹³ They are general and necessary conditions that are simply instantiated in the actual events to be explained. They are ontologically independent of its contingency.

Even though the reflections of classical philosophy start from the actual world, then, they do not remain satisfied with its contingency or uniqueness. What is accidental (or distinctive) about each event is reflectively cancelled by thought because it is inessential. This canceling procedure continues until thought comes upon those aspects of actuality which it cannot set aside. The results – or what cannot be "not thought" – are the fundamental or essential principles governing all reality. And they are what is most significant metaphysically. Indeed Aristotle indicates this significance by restricting the term "actuality" to those forms or essences. His distinctive use of the vocabulary of actuality for generals, and possibility or potentiality for the principle of individuation indicates that the Aristotelian metaphysics does not function within the perspective of historicity.¹⁴

Schelling characterizes this procedure by referring to two Greek negatives: $\mu\eta$ and $\sigma\upsilon\kappa$.¹⁵ The former is used primarily in the subjunctive mood to characterize situations that are in some way contrary to fact. The latter is the more straightforward negation of indicative assertion. Metaphysics, says Schelling following Kant, uses the subjunctive negation. Not-thinking some contingent actuality is not an actual event, but contrary-to-fact as a pure possibility. As one such possibility is added to another in the progressive exercise of critical reflection, we move toward pure possibility. It is generality created by thought, and subsists independent of, and prior to, the temporal world of singular actualities.

The result of such metaphysical reflection is universal. Whether called actuality or possibility, what is significant is a universal that covers a number of individuals and is instantiated in them. As that which cannot be not-thought, it is incapable of being otherwise, and so necessary. As the ultimate achievement of scientific knowledge, which wants to rise above contingent fact to universal law, principles and essences, it provides the ultimate significant characterization of the world.

Using the Kantian vocabulary, then, reflection concludes that atemporal possibilities are prior to temporal actualities and in some way *make them happen*. What is individual is limited by the range of generals and universals within which it occurs, whether these be Platonic ideas, Aristotelian forms or the laws of modern science. Whatever deviates from that generality is not significant, but simply an unimportant by-product. The universal thus necessarily conditions everything significant about what comes to be in time.

Note the inversion that has taken place. In its search for knowledge, classical philosophy starts from wonder about temporal actuals and moves on to general possibles – the same direction taken by a historical tradition. Its conclusion, however, is that the possibles are universals, and prior to the singulars.¹⁶ What thought identifies as general is ontologically more ultimate than the individual events. They are not mere abstractions of thought, but principles or laws, actually constitutive of the world. Indeed, in the most extreme form of determinism, there is no action or event that is not in *every* significant respect an instance of such general principles.

In sum, for classical metaphysics what is universal and necessary is ontologically prior to the singular and unique. In Aristotle's language, the generality of actuality or form becomes individuated in the potentiality of matter. In Kant's language, the universals of possibility are instantiated in temporal actualities. Generality is the necessary condition for the singulars we encounter, and there is never anything genuinely unique. Apart from the external and inessential processes of our reflection, singulars can never produce generals. Even in reflection they do not *generate* such universals but are simply clues adopted in order to discover what is already there.

We can now summarize. Historicity and classical philosophy have been shown to be direct opposites. For significant history requires that novel and unique singulars ontologically precede generals, while metaphysics assumes that universals ontologically precede individuals. In the first, temporal acts provide the necessary condition for reflective possibilities; in the second, formal or generalizable actualities provide the necessary conditions for what comes to be individuated. Each explicitly excludes the conditioning relationship espoused by the other. Any effort to integrate them without taking account of this fundamental contradiction will not easily succeed.

The purpose of this investigation into the general metaphysics of historicity is to show that Hegel's philosophy, by taking history and novel contingencies seriously, introduces a fundamental breach with classical

and traditional thought. As we shall see in the next chapter, Hegel's logic affirms that contingency is necessary, that actuals precede possibilities. And this spills over into the rest of his philosophy: what he means by knowledge, the method adopted by philosophical logic, the way thought does justice to the actualities of nature and human society. All are integrated into a philosophy that takes history seriously, in which contingent actuals and their abrasive interaction are the necessary means by which reason's universality is achieved.

Our approach will be episodic, rather than systematic. After a detailed exposition of the chapter in the *Science of Logic* on "Actuality," we shall turn to the role of contingency in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and then to the relationship between thought and the real world as explored in Hegel's Logic and Philosophies of Nature and of Spirit. Finally we shall consider the implications of this reading of Hegel for any attempt to practice Hegelian philosophy in the present. It is not surprising that, given the presuppositions we have identified, his conclusions can never become a template to be followed by later philosophers. It is rather a launching pad for initiating new explorations of the way the contingencies of history interact with the traditions we carry forward from the past.

2

The Necessity of Contingency

We begin our discussion of contingency with a detailed exposition of Hegel's chapter on Actuality from his *Science of Logic*, for in it he analyzes the key concepts of 'actuality,' 'possibility,' 'contingency' and 'necessity.'¹ These are Kant's modal categories, and Hegel has to identify their peculiar significance and how they fit into a complete network of meanings. For our purposes we need to see how each of these concepts as well as its various meanings arises, and why it leads on to other, more complicated senses. In doing so, we shall discover that Hegel's study of these modal terms leads to the conclusion that contingency is absolutely necessary – that unique individuals are not simply subordinated to overarching uniformity.

Because we are mounting a challenge to the traditional understanding of these terms, (as well as the traditional understanding of Hegel's philosophical thought) we need to advance cautiously. We have to show that our reading emerges out of the text itself and is not simply imposed from above. Since this requires a close reading of the text, we shall provide both the German original and an English translation for each paragraph before we develop our analysis.² As a result, this chapter does not make for easy reading, and those simply interested in our general conclusions should move on to the sequel.

We begin, not with the introduction to this chapter, but with the first paragraph in section A.

A. Contingency or formal actuality, possibility and necessity

1. Die Wirklichkeit ist formell, insofern sie als erste Wirklichkeit nur *unmittelbare, unreflektierte* Wirklichkeit, somit nur in dieser Formbestimmung, aber nicht als Totalität der Form ist. Sie ist so weiter nichts als ein *Sein* oder *Existenz* überhaupt. Aber weil sie *wesentlich* nicht bloße

unmittelbare Existenz, sondern als Formeinheit des Ansichseins oder der Innerlichkeit und der Äusserlichkeit ist, so enthält sie unmittelbar das *Ansichsein* oder die *Möglichkeit*. *Was wirklich ist, ist möglich*.

1. Actuality is formal in so far as, being an initial actuality, it is only *immediate, unreflective* actuality, and hence only in this [particular] formal determination, not yet as the totality of form. As such it is nothing more than a *being* or *existence* in general. But because it is *essentially* not a mere immediate existence, but as the formal unity of being in itself (or inwardness) and outwardness, it immediately contains the *being-in-itself* or *possibility*. *What is actual is possible*.

When thought first considers the concept 'actuality' in its simplest sense, apart from any content, it is virtually synonymous with 'being' or 'existence.' 'What is actual' seems no different from 'what is' or 'what exists.' But careful reflection leads to a more precise discrimination. In the first place, 'what is' is more abstract than either of the other two expressions; in the second place, the existence of an entity is distinguished from its essence, whereas 'actual' incorporates some sense of an inner essence that is publicly actualized. That essence, which is the inside of any actual, is more accurately thought of as its possibility. That the actual incorporates the possible specifies its difference from the apparently synonymous terms: 'being' and 'existence.' Dialectic has led us, then, from our primary term, 'actuality,' to a derivative term, 'possibility.' Hegel is saying that, conceptually, possibilities arise from actualities, and not vice versa.

2. Diese Möglichkeit ist die in sich reflektierte Wirklichkeit. Aber dies selbst erste *Reflektiertsein* ist ebenfalls das Formelle und hiemit überhaupt nur die *Bestimmung der Identität mit sich* oder des Ansichseins überhaupt.

2. This possibility is actuality reflected into itself. But even this first *reflectedness* is likewise something formal, and therefore in general only the *determination of identity with itself*, or of being-in-itself generally.

This first sense of possibility captures what the actual is in itself. But it, too, is quite formal, for it refers to no content, but simply indicates that the actual does not contradict itself. So at this point 'possibility' simply means 'self-identity' and little else.

Weil aber die Bestimmung hier *Totalität der Form* ist, ist dieses Ansichsein bestimmt als *Aufgehobenes* oder als wesentlich nur in Beziehung auf die Wirklichkeit, als das Negative von dieser, *gesetzt*

als Negatives. Die Möglichkeit enthält daher die zwei Momente: *erstlich* das *positive*, daß es ein Reflektiertsein in sich selbst ist; aber indem es in der absoluten Form herabgesetzt ist zu einem Momente, so gilt das Reflektiertsein-in-sich nicht mehr als *Wesen*, sondern hat *zweitens* die *negative* Bedeutung, daß die Möglichkeit ein Mangelhaftes ist, auf ein Anderes, die Wirklichkeit, hinweist und in dieser sich ergänzt.

Yet because the determination is here a *totality of form*, this being-in-itself is determined as something *sublated*; it is essential only in its relation to actuality as its negative, *posited* as negative. Possibility therefore contains two moments: *first* the *positive*: that it is something reflected into itself. But since, within the [total or] absolute form, it has been reduced to being a moment, this being-reflected-into-itself no longer has status as *essence*, but *second* has the *negative* significance that the possibility is something incomplete, pointing to something else – the actuality – and completing itself in that relationship.

The determination of being self-identical captures the formal character of everything considered in the *Logic* up to this point. As a result, when we focus on the particular meaning of possibility as we have it here, we have to think of it as pointing beyond itself to the actual and include this self-dissolving moment as part of its meaning. In other words, 'the possible' is not only the negative "opposite" of 'the actual;' its meaning explicitly contains this negative relationship. So 'possibility' at this point has a double sense: positively it is something reflected into itself; but once we consider the whole picture on its own (absolutely), we have to include the negative sense of its inherently lacking something, since it requires the actual to complete the picture.

Nach der ersten, der bloß positiven Seite ist die Möglichkeit also die bloße Formbestimmung *der Identität mit sich* oder die Form der Wesentlichkeit. So ist sie der verhältnislose, unbestimmte Behälter für alles überhaupt. – Im Sinne dieser formellen Möglichkeit ist *alles möglich, was sich nicht widerspricht*; das Reich der Möglichkeit ist daher die grenzenlose Mannigfaltigkeit. Aber jedes Mannigfaltige ist *in sich* und *gegen anderes bestimmt* und hat die Negation an ihm; überhaupt geht die gleichgültige *Verschiedenheit* in die *Entgegensetzung* über; die Entgegensetzung aber ist der Widerspruch. Daher ist *alles* ebensosehr ein Widersprechendes und daher *Unmögliches*.

Dies bloß formelle von etwas Aussagen, – *es ist möglich*, – ist daher ebenso flach und leer als der Satz des Widerspruchs und jeder in ihn

aufgenommenene Inhalt. *A* ist möglich, heißt so viel als *A* ist *A*. Insofern man sich nicht auf die Entwicklung des Inhalts einläßt, so hat dieser die Form der *Einfachheit*; erst durch die Auflösung desselben in seine Bestimmungen kommt der *Unterschied* an ihm hervor. Indem man sich an jene einfache Form hält, so bleibt der Inhalt ein mit sich Identisches und daher ein *Mögliches*. Es ist aber damit ebenso *nichts* gesagt als mit dem formellen identischen Satze.

When we consider the first, merely positive, side, 'possibility' refers to the bare formal determination of self-identity – the form of essentiality. Such a term, lacking relations to anything else, becomes an indeterminate container for everything in general. When possibility has this strictly formal sense, *everything is possible which does not contradict itself*. The realm of possibility thus becomes a limitless multiplicity. But each one of these multiples is *determinate in itself* and *distinct from others*; it contains negation. In general, an indifferent *diversity* moves on to *opposition*; and opposition becomes contradiction. So *everything* is just as much something self contradictory and so *impossible*.

(This strictly formal expression – saying of something that it is possible – is thus just as bland and empty as the law of contradiction, as well as any content included within it. 'A is possible' says no more than 'A is A.' As long as one does not enter into the way the content develops, that content has the form of *simplicity*; only with the dissolution of that simplicity does *difference* emerge in the content. To the extent that one holds to that simple form, the content remains something self-identical and so something *possible*. As in the formal law of identity, *nothing* is being said.)

We now need to explore how the two senses are related. We take the positive sense first. What is possible is self-identical. In other words, everything is possible which does not contradict itself. The universality of that statement, however, poses problems. For the term 'everything' includes within its range a large number of distinct possibilities, some of which will contradict others. There is thus a sense in which *everything* – stressing the universality of 'every' – is not possible.

The following paragraph functions as a remark made by Hegel in the course of his logical argument, and so needs little expansion.

Das Mögliche enthält jedoch mehr als der bloß identische Satz. Das Mögliche ist das *reflektierte In-sich-reflektiertsein* oder das Identische

schlechthin als *Moment* der Totalität, somit auch bestimmt, nicht *an sich zu sein*; es hat daher die zweite Bestimmung *nur* ein Mögliches zu sein, und das *Sollen* der Totalität der Form. Die Möglichkeit ohne dieses Sollen ist die *Wesentlichkeit* als solche; aber die absolute Form enthält dies, daß das Wesen selbst nur Moment [ist] und ohne Sein seine Wahrheit nicht hat. Die Möglichkeit ist diese bloße Wesentlichkeit, so *gesetzt*, daß sie nur Moment und der absoluten Form nicht gemäß ist. Sie ist das Ansichsein, bestimmt, als nur ein *Gesetztes*, oder ebensosehr als *nicht an sich zu sein*. – Die Möglichkeit ist daher an ihr selbst auch der Widerspruch, oder sie ist *die Unmöglichkeit*.

Nonetheless the possible contains more than this bare law of identity. The possible is the *reflected being that is reflected into itself*, or the identical simply as a *moment* of the totality; and so determined not *to be in itself*. Thus it has the second determination of being *only* a possible, or the *ought to be* of form's totality. Possibility lacking this 'ought-to-be' is simply *essentiality* as such. But the absolute form contains this: that the essence is itself only a moment and, lacking being, has no truth. Possibility is this bare essentiality *posited* in such a way that it is only a moment and not commensurate to the absolute form. It is the being-in-itself that is determined to be only something *posited*, which is to say, *not to be in itself*. So possibility is inherently a contradiction, that is, *the impossible*.

We can reach this contradiction another way. As the essence of the actual, the possible captures what it is in itself. But it does so because it has been isolated by an act of reflection which identifies the reflective core of the actual – the way the actual reflects within itself this possibility. As a transient moment within this total picture, the possible is not something that stands on its own, but rather points beyond itself to what it ought to be – a fulfilled actual. Apart from the being of this other, the possible has no truth. This means that the possible is not something inherent, but rather something constituted by the demands of the actual. So what is, in one sense, the 'in-itself' is, in another sense, not in itself but in another. Since it is essentially defined in terms of this internal contradiction, 'possibility' is not self-identical, and so it is impossible.

Zunächst drückt sich dies so aus, daß die Möglichkeit als *aufgehoben gesetzte Formbestimmung* einen *Inhalt* überhaupt an ihr hat. Dieser ist als möglich ein Ansichsein, das zugleich ein aufgehobenes oder ein *Anderssein* ist. Weil er also nur ein möglicher ist, ist ebensosehr ein

anderer und sein Gegenteil *möglich*. A ist A ; ebenso $\neg A$ ist $\neg A$. Diese beiden Sätze drücken jeder die Möglichkeit seiner Inhaltsbestimmung aus. Aber als diese identischen Sätze sind sie gleichgültig gegeneinander; es ist mit einem *nicht gesetzt*, daß auch der andere hinzukomme. Die Möglichkeit ist die vergleichende Beziehung beider; sie enthält es in ihrer Bestimmung als eine Reflexion der Totalität, daß auch das Gegenteil möglich sei. Sie ist daher der beziehende *Grund*, daß *darum*, weil $A = A$, auch $\neg A = \neg A$ ist; in dem möglichen A ist auch das mögliche Nicht- A enthalten, und diese Beziehung selbst ist es, welche beide als mögliche bestimmt.

This first finds expression in the possibility, as a *formal determination constituted as sublated*, having some kind of *content* in general. As possible, this content is a being-in-itself which is at the same time something sublated or an *otherness*. Since it is only something possible, something *else*, its opposite, is equally *possible*. A is A ; equally $\neg A$ is $\neg A$. Each of these two sentences expresses the possibility of its determinate content. Yet as simple laws of identity, these two are indifferent to each other. With one of them it is *not posited* that the other comes into play. Possibility is simply the comparative relation of one with the other. Within its determination as a reflection of totality, possibility contains the fact that the opposite is also possible. It is, then, the relating *ground* which establishes that, simply because $A = A$, $\neg A$ *therefore* also $= \neg A$. The possible *not- A* is contained in the possible A . Indeed, it is just this relationship which defines both as possible.

The dialectical paradox becomes explicit when thought does not think about possibility in general, but about a specific possibility. If something, let us say A , is possible, then according to the positive meaning of the term, A is self-identical. However, in thinking A , we must define it in contrast to its opposite, *not- A* ; and this is equally self identical, for *not- A* $=$ *not- A* . Taken on their own, each of these statements of identity is indifferent to the other. But within the meaning of 'possibility' lies the fact that we need to compare these two within a single perspective. For when we say that something is possible, we imply that its opposite is equally possible.

Als diese Beziehung aber, daß in dem einen Möglichen auch sein Anderes enthalten ist, ist sie der Widerspruch, der sich aufhebt. Da sie nun ihrer Bestimmung nach das Reflektierte, und wie sich gezeigt hat, das sich aufhebende Reflektierte ist, so ist sie somit auch das Unmittelbare, und damit wird sie *Wirklichkeit*.

Yet as this relationship where, within a possibility, its other is contained, 'possibility' is a contradiction which sublates itself. Since, according to its definition, possibility is not only something reflected, but (as we have seen) something reflected that sublates itself, it is thereby also something immediate, and hence comes to be *actuality*.

Speculative reason finds that it is faced with an intriguing dialectic. It began thinking of possibility as the inner essence of the actual – what the actual actualizes. In its positive sense, however, the possible is what is self-identical. Reflection on the latter has shown that it is no longer possible to claim that the actual is simply the possible actualized. For contradictory possibles have emerged. Whenever we try to complete the picture in our understanding of 'possibility,' then, we discover that we have to move to an actual which is not just the being of possibility pure and simple, but rather excludes some possibilities even as it realizes others.

3. Diese Wirklichkeit ist nicht die erste, sondern die reflektierte, *gesetzt als Einheit* ihrer selbst und der Möglichkeit. Das Wirkliche als solches ist möglich; es ist in unmittelbarer positiver Identität mit der Möglichkeit; aber diese hat sich bestimmt als *nur* Möglichkeit; somit ist auch das Wirkliche als *nur ein Mögliches*. Und unmittelbar darum, weil die Möglichkeit in der Wirklichkeit *unmittelbar* enthalten ist, ist sie darin als aufgehobene, als *nur* Möglichkeit. Umgekehrt die Wirklichkeit, die in Einheit ist mit der Möglichkeit, ist nur die aufgehobene Unmittelbarkeit; – oder darum weil the formelle Wirklichkeit nur *unmittelbare* erste ist, ist sie nur Moment, nur aufgehobene Wirklichkeit oder nur *Möglichkeit*.

3. This actuality is not the one we started with, but the one born of reflection, *posited as the unity* of itself and possibility. The actual on its own is possible; it is in an immediate positive identity with possibility. But now possibility has defined itself as *only* possible; and in the same move, the actual is defined as *only one possible* [among many]. And immediately for the reason that possibility is contained in actuality *immediately*, it lies therein as sublated, as *only* a possibility. On the other hand, actuality which is united with possibility is only sublated immediacy. In other words, just because formal actuality is only *immediately* first, it is only a moment, only a sublated actuality; that is to say, only *possibility*.

The actual still is intrinsically possible. The immediate identity remains. But the possible per se is only possible and not inevitably actualized.

Therefore the actual, as now thought, is not simply the possible, but only one possible of many. This complex reflection, which includes possibility as only possible, transcends and cancels the original sense of 'the actual.' Indeed, since that original immediate sense did not distinguish between possibles, it is now evident that it did not do justice to the more inclusive sense of 'actuality' now developed. As the simple identity of actuality and possibility, that first definition was only a possibility itself.

Hiemit ist zugleich näher die Bestimmung ausgedrückt, inwiefern die *Möglichkeit Wirklichkeit* ist. Die Möglichkeit ist nämlich noch nicht *alle Wirklichkeit*, – von der realen und absoluten Wirklichkeit ist noch nicht die Rede gewesen; – sie ist nur erst diejenige, welche zuerst vorkam, nämlich die formelle, die sich bestimmt hat, *nur Möglichkeit* zu sein, also die formelle Wirklichkeit, welche nur *Sein* oder *Existenz* überhaupt ist. Alles Mögliche hat daher überhaupt ein *Sein* oder ein *Existenz*.

With this we have captured the determinate way *possibility* is *actuality*. To be sure, possibility is not yet *all* actuality – we have not yet spoken of real actuality or absolute actuality. It is only that kind of actuality which first emerged: the formal kind which is defined as being *only* possibility; that is, the formal actuality which is only *being* and *existence* in general. In this general sense everything possible has a *being* or an *existence*.

But this implies in turn that possibilities are actual. To be sure, they are not *really* actual, or absolutely and completely actual. The sense is rather that original one where actuality can barely be distinguished from the vague generality of being, or the universality of simple existence. Possibilities are immediately present to thought. *In this sense*, all possibilities are, have existence, and are actual.

Diese Einheit der Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit ist die *Zufälligkeit*. – Das Zufällige ist ein Wirkliches, das zugleich nur als möglich bestimmt, dessen Anderes oder Gegenteil ebensosehr ist. Diese Wirklichkeit ist daher bloßes Sein oder Existenz, aber in seiner Wahrheit gesetzt, den Wert eines Gesetzseins oder der Möglichkeit zu haben. Umgekehrt ist die Möglichkeit als die *Reflexion-in-sich* oder das *Ansichsein* gesetzt als Gesetzsein; was möglich ist, ist ein Wirkliches in diesem Sinne der Wirklichkeit; es hat nur so viele Wert als die zufällige Wirklichkeit; es ist selbst ein Zufälliges.

This unity of possibility and actuality is *contingency*. The contingent is an actual which is determined at the same time only as possible, whose other, or opposite is equally [possible]. This actuality is thus mere being or existence, but posited in its truth as having the value of something posited or of possibility. On the other hand possibility as *reflection into itself* or as *being-in-itself* is posited as something posited. What is possible is an actual in this sense of actuality. It has no more value than that of contingent actuality. It is itself something contingent.

We have now reached the concept of contingency. For the contingent is an actuality which is nonetheless simply something possible. Its alternatives are equally possible. This actual is a being or an existent, but with the sense of being constituted out of possibility. At the same time, what is possible, as the inherent essence of the actual, is now constituted as something constituted (posited) by thought. It, too, is a contingent actuality.

Das Zufällige bietet daher die zwei Seiten dar; *erstens* insofern es die Möglichkeit *unmittelbar* an ihm hat, oder, was dasselbe ist, insofern sie in ihm aufgehoben ist, ist es *nicht Gesetztsein* noch vermittelt, sondern *unmittelbare* Wirklichkeit; es hat *keinen Grund*. – Weil auch dem Möglichen diese unmittelbare Wirklichkeit zukommt, so ist es sosehr als das Wirkliche bestimmt als zufällig und ebenfalls ein *Grundloses*.

The contingent presents us with two sides: *first*, because it has possibility *immediately* present [in its meaning], or (which is the same thing) because possibility is sublated in it, it is *neither something posited* nor mediated, but *immediate* actuality; it has *no ground*. – Because as well this immediate actuality belongs to the possible, this latter, as actual, is determined to be contingent, and so something *lacking any ground*.

What are the implications of this definition of ‘contingent?’ In the first place, there is no reason or ground why this contingent actual, rather than its opposite, was actualized. Whatever ground it has is simply its own actuality. To this extent it is groundless. Similarly, the range of self-identical possibilities is indifferent to its multiplicity and implicit contradictions. There is nothing within any particular possible that can explain the actuals that do result. They, too, lack any inherent ground or justification. Therefore, within the meaning of contingency, both the actual and the possible are groundless.

Das Zufällige ist aber *zweitens* das Wirkliche als ein *nur* Mögliches oder als ein *Gesetztsein*; so auch das Mögliche ist als formelles An-sich-sein nur Gesetztsein. Somit ist beides nicht an und für sich selbst, sondern hat seine wahrhafte Reflexion-in-sich in einem Andern, *oder es hat einen Grund*.

Second, however, the contingent is an actual that is something *only* possible, or something that has been posited. Similarly the possible as formal being-in-itself is only something posited. Thus each is not in and of itself but has its valid reflection-into-itself within an other. *That is to say that it has a ground*.

But this is not the total picture. For the 'actual' is defined as that which actualizes the possible. The two terms are used in the definition of contingency because the actual is, in some sense, grounded in the possible. Similarly, the possible is thought of as self-identical because it is implicitly what the actual is explicitly. Its meaning is grounded in the actual. Thus the term 'contingency' also includes within its meaning the mutual grounding of the actual in the possible and of the possible in the actual.

Das Zufällige hat also darum keinen Grund, weil es zufällig ist; und ebensowohl hat es einen Grund, darum weil es zufällig ist.

So the contingent has no ground because it is contingent; and it equally has a ground because it is contingent.

In other words, analysis of the meaning of 'contingency' gives the paradoxical conclusion that, as contingent, it lacks a ground, and, as contingent, it is grounded.

Es ist das *gesetzte*, unvermittelte *Umschlagen* des Innern und Äußern oder des In-sich-reflektiert-seins und des Seins ineinander, – *gesetzt* dadurch, daß Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit, jede an ihr selbst diese Bestimmung hat, dadurch daß sie Momente der absoluten Form sind. – So ist die Wirklichkeit in ihrer *unmittelbaren* Einheit mit der Möglichkeit nur die Existenz und bestimmt als Grundloses, das *nur ein Gesetztes* oder *nur* Mögliches ist; – oder als reflektiert und bestimmt *gegen* die Möglichkeit, so ist sie von der Möglichkeit, von dem In-sich-reflektiert-sein getrennt und somit ebenso unmittelbar auch *nur* ein Mögliches. – Ebenso die Möglichkeit, als *einfaches* Ansichsein, ist es Unmittelbares, *nur* ein Seiendes überhaupt, oder *entgegengesetzt*

gegen die Wirklichkeit, ebenso ein wirklichkeitsloses Ansichsein, *nur* ein Mögliches, aber eben darum wieder nur eine nicht in sich reflektierte Existenz überhaupt.

What we have is the *posited*, unmediated *inversion* into each other of the inner and outer, or of being reflected into itself and of [pure] being. This inversion is *posited* by the fact that both possibility and actuality have on their own this determination: to be moments of the absolute form. – Thus actuality in its *immediate* unity with possibility is merely existence and determined as groundless, which itself is *only something posited* or *only* possible. Alternatively, as reflected and determined as *contrary* to possibility, actuality is separated from possibility – from being reflected into itself – and so just as much immediately *only* something possible. In the same way, possibility, as *simple* being-in-itself, is something immediate, *merely* a being in general. Alternatively, as *opposed* to actuality, possibility is just as much a being-in-itself that lacks actuality, *merely* something possible, and for that very reason again only an existence in general that is not reflected into itself.

In thinking through this contradiction implicit in the term ‘contingency,’ thought finds itself moving from moment to moment with a restless somersaulting of meanings. Four stages can be distinguished:³ (1) The contingent *actual* is thought of as immediately one with its possibility – with what it is in itself. It is simple existence without a ground. Yet, lacking a ground which it actualizes it loses the distinctive sense of ‘actual.’ It is simply *possible*. (2) The *actual* is thought of as distinct from the possible which is its ground. But the possible is not sufficient to ground its actuality as contingent, since it is only one of a number of *possibles*. (3) The *possible* is thought in its simple, positive sense of self-identity. But as such it does have actuality in the universal sense of ‘that which is.’ It is immediately *actual*. (4) The *possible*, thought of as distinct from, and reflectively derived from, the actual lacks actuality. But even so it has a bare existence which is not reflectively constituted. Again it is immediately *actual*.

Diese *absolute Unruhe* des *Werdens* dieser beiden Bestimmungen ist die *Zufälligkeit*. Aber darum weil jede unmittelbar in die entgegengesetzte umschlägt, so *geht* sie in dieser ebenso schlechthin *mit sich selbst zusammen*, und diese *Identität* derselben, einer in der andern, ist die *Notwendigkeit*.

This *absolutely restless becoming* of these two determinations is *contingency*. But just because each immediately converts into its opposite, contingency simply *collapses into itself* through these determinations. This their *identity*, of one in another, is *necessity*.

In the concept 'contingency,' 'actual' and 'possible' are taken, first in their immediate positive senses, and then as distinct from their contraries. But none of these four senses remains where it began: it converts into its opposite. This total conversion of senses is the result when thought endeavours to render the concept 'contingency' determinate. We have a complex cycle of meanings which return to their starting point. As a self-contained conceptual identity, this complexity collapses into a single concept, which can now become the focus of understanding's quest for definition. The result seems paradoxical. For an actuality that is the same as its possibility, and a possibility that is nothing other than actual is necessary. When the transitions from one meaning to another are compressed into a simple unity, 'contingency' is no longer the appropriate term.

Das Notwendige ist ein *Wirkliches*; so ist es als Unmittelbares, *Grundloses*; es hat aber ebenso sehr seine Wirklichkeit *durch ein Anderes* oder in seinem Grunde, aber ist zugleich das Gesetzsein dieses Grundes und die Reflexion desselben in sich; die Möglichkeit des Notwendigen ist eine aufgehobene. Das Zufällige ist also notwendig, darum weil das Wirkliche als Mögliches bestimmt, damit seine Unmittelbarkeit aufgehoben und in *Grund* oder *Ansichsein* und in *Begründetes* abgestoßen ist, als auch weil diese seine *Möglichkeit* die *Grundbeziehung*, schlechthin aufgehoben und als Sein gesetzt ist. Das Notwendige *ist*, und dies Seiende ist *selbst das Notwendige*. Zugleich ist es *an sich*; diese Reflexion-in-sich ist ein *Anderes* als jene Unmittelbarkeit des Seins, und die Notwendigkeit des Seienden ist *ein Anderes*. Das Seiende selbst ist so nicht das Notwendige; aber dieses Ansichsein ist selbst nur Gesetzsein; es ist aufgehoben und selbst unmittelbar. So ist die Wirklichkeit in ihrem Unterschiedenen, der Möglichkeit, identisch mit sich selbst. Als diese Identität ist sie Notwendigkeit.

The necessary is something *actual*; as immediate it thus lacks a ground. At the same time it has its actuality *through an other* or in its ground. Yet it is equally the being posited of this ground and its reflection into itself. The possibility of the necessary has been sublated. The contingent is thus necessary, just because the actual is determined to

be possible and so its immediacy is sublated and pushed off into *ground* (or *being-in-itself*) and *grounded*; and also because this its *possibility* or *grounding relation* has been completely sublated and posited as being. The necessary *is*, and this being is *itself the necessary*. At the same time the necessary is *in itself*. This reflection into itself is something *other* than that immediacy of being, and the necessity of a being is *something else*. A being as such is not the necessary; but this being-in-itself [of the necessary] is itself only something posited. It is sublated and thereby immediate. In this way actuality is identical with itself in what is distinguished from it – possibility. As this identity it is necessity.

This curious consequence needs to be justified. What is necessary is an actual that is both immediately present and needs no further justification. Since the actualization of one possibility excludes its opposite from being actualized, the latter is thereby rendered impossible. But that whose opposite is not possible is necessary. As actual, then, the necessary is immediate and not grounded in something else, yet it *is* grounded in its own intrinsic possibility, since its opposite is impossible. In this sense, 'the necessary' is an actual that is intrinsically its own possibility, and thus lacks a ground, while being yet grounded in that possibility. And its possibility is simply its own actuality, even though it is thought as possible through reflection on that actuality. The complex of meanings that resulted from a careful understanding of the meaning of 'contingency' turns out, when collapsed into a single concept, to be identical with this formal sense of 'necessity' as that whose opposite is not possible. In the meaning of 'contingency' the various moments are left distinct and are not thought together. In this particular sense of 'necessity' they are explicitly integrated, and the distinctions are left implicit. In that sense, then, 'the contingent' is the same as 'the necessary.'

We have here defined 'necessity' in a purely formal sense as the reflective impossibility of the opposite of any given actuality. It is the unity of possibility as ground and of actuality as groundless. But these two terms have been equally formal and independent of content. The actual started out as simply what is, and the possible as simple self-identity. These are not the only senses of these terms, and therefore the result is a somewhat specious victory. For the necessity of contingency as currently established would lead to no more than the concession that whatever is contingently actual is necessary, since whatever is now actual cannot be otherwise. Although this sense of 'necessity' was used in the argument for fatalism developed by the Megarans, it does not cover the sense of 'necessity' which is more common in the contemporary world. Hegel himself recognized

this consequence. So he takes us further in exploring what the necessity of contingency would mean.

B. Relative necessity, or real actuality, possibility, and necessity

1. Die Notwendigkeit, die sich ergeben hat, ist *formell*, weil ihre Momente formell sind, nämlich einfache Bestimmungen, die nur als unmittelbare Einheit oder als unmittelbares Umschlagen des einen in das andere Totalität sind und somit nicht die Gestalt des Selbständigkeit haben. – In dieser formellen Notwendigkeit ist daher die Einheit zunächst einfach und gegen ihre Unterschiede gleichgültig. Als *unmittelbare* Einheit der Formbestimmungen ist diese Notwendigkeit *Wirklichkeit*; aber eine solche, die, – weil ihre Einheit nunmehr *bestimmt ist als gleichgültig* gegen den *Unterschied* der Formbestimmungen, nämlich ihrer selbst und der Möglichkeit, einen *Inhalt* hat. Dieser als gleichgültige Identität enthält auch die Form als gleichgültige, d.h. als bloß *verschiedene* Bestimmungen, und ist *mannigfaltiger* Inhalt überhaupt. Diese Wirklichkeit ist *reale Wirklichkeit*.

1. The necessity which has emerged is formal, since its moments are formal; which is to say that they are simple determinations which are a totality only as an immediate unity, or as an immediate shifting of one into the other, so that they do not have an independent status. – In this formal necessity, then, the unity is initially simple and indifferent to its differences. As an *immediate* unity of formal determinations, this necessity is *actuality*, but of a kind which – because its unity now is *determined to be indifferent* with reference to the *difference* of the formal determinations (that is, of itself and possibility) – has a *content*. As an indifferent identity, this content also contains the form as indifferent – as merely diverse determinations – and is in general a *multifarious* content. This actuality is *real actuality*.

As we have seen, the formally necessary is a contingent actual. Having its actuality identical with its possibility, alternative possibilities are excluded, and as a result this actuality has a determinate content, which can be determined in various ways. This kind of actuality, being richly determinate, is no longer thought of in formal terms, but as something real.

Die reale Wirklichkeit *als solche* ist zunächst das Ding von vielen Eigenschaften, die existierende Welt; aber sie ist nicht die Existenz, welche sich in Erscheinung auflöst, sondern als Wirklichkeit ist sie

zugleich Ansichsein und Reflexion-in-sich; sie erhält sich in der Mannigfaltigkeit der bloßen Existenz; ihre Äußerlichkeit ist innerliches Verhalten nur zu sich selbst. Was wirklich ist, *kann wirken*; seine Wirklichkeit gibt etwas kund *durch das, was es hervorbringt*. Sein Verhalten zu anderem ist die Manifestation *seiner*: weder ein Übergehen, – so bezieht das seiende Etwas sich auf anderes, – noch ein Erscheinen, – so ist das Ding nur im Verhältnis zu andern, ist ein Selbständiges, das aber seine Reflexion-in-sich, seine bestimmte Wesentlichkeit in einem andern Selbständigen hat.

Real actuality *as such* is initially a thing with many properties – the existing world. But it is not the kind of existence which dissipates itself into appearance; rather, as actuality it is both being-in-itself and reflection-into-itself at once. It maintains itself in the multiplicity of mere existence; any externality is only an inner relationship to itself. What is actual *can act*; its actuality makes something known *through that which it produces*. Any relationship it has with others is the manifestation *of itself*: neither a transition (in the way something relates to another) nor an appearance (in the way a thing, in its relationship with others, is something independent which has its reflection-into-itself – its determinate essentiality – in some independent other).

The real actual is a thing with many determinate properties. But the term 'actual' is not simply equivalent to the thing as distinct from its properties, nor to existence as distinct from appearance. It has, in addition, the sense of *activity* – of actualizing through its own inherent dynamic what it is in itself.

Die reale Wirklichkeit hat nun gleichfalls die *Möglichkeit* unmittelbar *an ihr selbst*. Sie enthält das Moment des Ansichseins; aber als nur erst die *unmittelbare* Einheit ist sie in *einer* der Bestimmungen der Form, hiemit als das Seiende von dem Ansichsein oder der Möglichkeit unterschieden.

Real actuality has also *possibility* immediately *as part of itself*. It contains the moment of being-in-itself. However, as initially only an *immediate* unity, it is present in only *one* of the formal determinations; as a being it is distinct from the being-in-itself or possibility.

This new sense of actuality integrates possibility and actuality. But as an immediate unit, it can be thought of as having only one of these formal

determinations. So we ascribe being or actuality to it, while separating off a new, distinct, sense of possibility to identify the 'in itself' that it actualizes.

2. Diese Möglichkeit als das Ansichsein der *realen* Wirklichkeit ist selbst *reale Möglichkeit*, zunächst das *inhaltvolle* Ansichsein. – Die formelle Möglichkeit ist die Reflexion-in-sich nur als die abstrakte Identität, daß Etwas sich in sich nicht widerspreche. Insofern man sich aber auf die Bestimmungen, Umstände, Bedingungen einer Sache einläßt, um daraus ihre Möglichkeit zu erkennen, bleibt man nicht mehr bei der formellen stehen, sondern betrachtet ihre reale Möglichkeit.

Diese reale Möglichkeit ist selbst *unmittelbare* Existenz, nicht mehr aber darum, weil die Möglichkeit als solche, als formelles Moment, unmittelbar ihr Gegenteil, eine nicht reflektierte Wirklichkeit ist; sondern weil sie *reale* Möglichkeit ist, hat sie sogleich diese Bestimmung an ihr selbst. Die reale Möglichkeit einer Sache ist daher die daseiende Mannigfaltigkeit von Umständen, die sich auf sie beziehen.

2. As the being-in-itself of *real* actuality, this possibility is *real possibility*, initially the being-in-itself that is *full of content*. – Formal possibility is a reflection-into-itself only as an abstract identity – something that does not contradict itself. Once one involves oneself with the determinations, circumstances and conditions of some entity with the idea of deciphering its possibility, one no longer remains with its formal possibility, but considers instead its real possibility.

This real possibility is itself *immediate* existence, no longer because the possibility as such – as formal possibility – is immediately its opposite, a non-reflected actuality. Rather, because it is *real* possibility, it has this determination [existence] directly within itself. The real possibility of an entity is thus the existing multiplicity of circumstances that are directly related to it.

That which becomes actualized is the possible. But when we look for that which makes real actuals possible, we are not satisfied with the formal definition of self-identity. Instead, the possibility of an actual is the dynamic ground, "pregnant with content," out of which the specific characteristics are actualized. In other words, it is a 'real possibility' in both senses of the phrase: it is a *real possibility* as that which has the likelihood of becoming actual; it is *real* possibility as the full range of actual

conditions which are sufficient to generate some actual. Reflective thought becomes speculative as it explores the tension between these two senses that have emerged dialectically from 'real actuality.'

Diese Mannigfaltigkeit des Daseins ist also zwar sowohl Möglichkeit als Wirklichkeit, aber ihre Identität ist nur erst der *Inhalt*, der gegen diese Formbestimmung gleichgültig ist; sie machen daher die Form aus *bestimmt* gegen ihre Identität. – Oder die *unmittelbare* reale Wirklichkeit, darum weil sie unmittelbare ist, ist gegen ihre Möglichkeit bestimmt; als diese bestimmte, somit reflektierte, ist sie die *reale Möglichkeit*. Diese ist nun zwar das gesetzte *Ganze* der Form, aber der Form in ihrer Bestimmtheit, nämlich der Wirklichkeit als formeller oder unmittelbarer und ebenso der Möglichkeit als des abstrakten Ansichseins. Diese Wirklichkeit, welche die Möglichkeit einer Sache ausmacht, ist daher nicht *ihre eigene Möglichkeit*, sondern das Ansichsein eines *andern* Wirklichen; sie selbst ist die Wirklichkeit, die aufgehoben werden soll, die Möglichkeit als *nur* Möglichkeit. – So macht die reale Möglichkeit das *Ganze von Bedingungen* aus, eine nicht in sich reflektierte, zerstreute Wirklichkeit, welche aber bestimmt ist, das Ansichsein, aber eines Andern zu sein und in sich zurückgehen zu sollen.

This multiplicity of beings is thus as much possibility as actuality, but their being identified together is simply a matter of their *content* at first, a content which is indifferent to their formal determination. [As multiple,] they constitute the form as *determinate* over against their identity. – Alternatively, the *immediate* real actuality, simply because it is immediate, is determinate over against its possibility. As thus determinate, that is, reflected, this latter is *real* possibility. This [kind of possibility] is now the *whole* of the form as posited, but the form in its determinacy, which is of actuality as formal or immediate and equally of possibility as abstract being-in-itself. This actuality which constitutes the possibility of an entity is thus not *its own possibility*, but the being-in-itself of an *other* actual. It itself is an actuality which is to be sublated, possibility as *merely* possibility. – In this way real possibility constitutes the *totality of conditions* – a dispersed actuality, not reflected into itself, which is nonetheless determined both to be the being-in-itself of something else and to go back into itself.

Real possibilities are made up of a number of *actual* conditions. Each of these is an actuality as well as a possibility. Their diverse actuality is characterized as a possibility only because, together, they are related, as

ground, to *some other* actuality. This formal distinction stands in contrast to the identity of content which the possibility transfers to this resulting actuality. To capture all of this content, however, real possibility must incorporate not simply one, but the totality of actual conditions on the basis of which *all* the determinations of that real actuality come to be actualized. For, if all the conditions are not present, the actual is not really possible. In other words, a diverse multitude of actualities are put together under the concept 'real possibility.' That specific integration is made by thought only because of some actuality which is distinct from any one of those conditions.

Was real möglich ist, ist also nach seinem *Ansichsein* ein formelles Identisches, das nach seiner *einfachen* Inhaltsbestimmung sich nicht widerspricht; aber auch nach seinen entwickelten und unterschiedenen Umständen und allem, womit es im Zusammenhange steht, muß es als das mit sich Identische sich nicht widersprechen. Aber *zweitens*, weil es in sich mannigfaltig und mit anderem in mannigfaltigem Zusammenhange ist, die Verschiedenheit aber an sich selbst in Entgegensetzung übergeht, ist es ein Widersprechendes. Wenn von einer Möglichkeit die Rede ist und deren Widerspruch aufgezeigt werden soll, so hat man sich nur an die Mannigfaltigkeit, die sie als Inhalt oder als ihre bedingte Existenz enthält, zu halten, woraus sich leicht ihr Widerspruch auffinden läßt. – Dies ist aber nicht ein Widerspruch der Vergleichung, sondern die mannigfaltige Existenz ist *an sich selbst* dies, sich aufzuheben und zugrunde zu gehen, und hat darin wesentlich die Bestimmung, *nur ein Mögliches* zu sein, an ihr selbst. – Wenn alle Bedingungen einer Sache vollständig vorhanden sind, so tritt sie in Wirklichkeit; – die Vollständigkeit der Bedingungen ist die Totalität als am Inhalte, und *die Sache selbst* ist dieser Inhalt, bestimmt, ebenso ein Wirkliches als Mögliches zu sein. In der Sphäre des bedingten Grundes haben die Bedingungen die Form, nämlich den Grund oder die für sich seiende Reflexion, *außer ihnen*, welche sie zu Momenten der Sache bezieht und die Existenz *an ihnen* hervorbringt. Hier hingegen ist die unmittelbare Wirklichkeit nicht durch eine voraussetzende Reflexion bestimmt, Bedingung zu sein, sondern es ist gesetzt daß sie selbst die Möglichkeit ist.

What is really possible is, considered as being-in-itself, something formally identical, which, in accordance with its *simple* determination of content, does not contradict itself. But, taking into account its developed and differentiated circumstances as well as everything

with which it is connected, it must also not contradict itself, since it is to be identical with itself. *Secondly*, however, because within itself it is manifold and in multiple connections with others, and because diversity on its own passes over into opposition, it is something contradictory. If one wants to speak of a possibility and to show its contradiction, one has only to observe the multiplicity which it contains as content or as its conditioned existence; from there it is easy to expose its contradiction. – This is, however, not a contradiction of comparison, but the manifold existence *on its own* is destined to sublimate itself and go to ground, and so has essentially the determination of being *merely something possible* within itself. – When all the conditions of an entity are completely present it emerges into actuality. The completeness of conditions is the totality with respect to the content, and *the entity itself* is this content, determined to be as much something actual as possible. In the sphere of conditioning ground [earlier in the *Logic*] the conditions have the form, that is the ground or the reflection on its own account, *outside themselves*, a form which makes them into moments of the entity and brings forth existence *with respect to them*. Here, in contrast, the immediate actuality is not determined through some kind of presupposing reflection to be a condition, but it is so constituted that it is itself the possibility.

The concept ‘real possibility’ is highly complex, requiring a more thorough speculative exploration. On the one hand, since the content is an actual in one respect, and a possible in another, the sense of ‘possible’ is purely formal – it is that which does not contradict itself. On the other hand, as the totality of conditions for one actuality, it must be such that these conditions can be integrated without contradiction. Both formally and with respect to specific determinations, it is that which does not contradict itself.

Further considerations, however, complicate the picture. For reflection on the multiplicity that is inherent in real possibility distinguishes formally the different conditions. Each condition, as self-identical and immediately actual, is distinct from the others. As such it stands over against the others. But then it is contradictory to say that they are *one* possibility. Using the purely formal sense of ‘possibility’ it is not possible for a variety of different conditions to be one. This strange conclusion follows not only from formal considerations but also from material considerations of real possibility as a totality of conditions. A set of conditions is called the real possibility of an actual because, when brought together, the multiplicity will be cancelled, and indeed collapse, as possibility.

It *cannot* maintain itself as many. In other words, it is *not possible* for all the conditions to be integrated as a totality and still be simply possible; for when all the conditions of something are present, it has to become actual. Indeed, the actuality as a thing with many properties is itself nothing else but this integration of its conditions.

On the one hand, a set of conditions is not the real possibility of a thing unless all the conditions are present. On the other hand, when all the conditions are present, the thing is no longer simply possible, but actual. Indeed, the paradox is even stronger than this: real possibility is that which, to be possible, contradicts itself neither formally nor materially; yet real possibility can be a simple self-identity neither formally nor materially, since, when all the conditions come together, it passes directly over into the real actual. Reflection on real possibility shows that it is not possible to be both a *real* possibility of an actuality, and yet distinct from that actuality as possibility.

In der sich aufhebenden realen Möglichkeit ist es nun ein Gedoppeltes, das aufgehoben wird; denn sie ist selbst das Gedoppelte, Wirklichkeit und Möglichkeit zu sein. 1. Die Wirklichkeit ist die formelle, oder eine Existenz, die als selbständige unmittelbare erschien und durch ihr Aufheben zum reflektierten Sein, zum Moment eines Andern wird und somit das *Ansichsein* an ihr erhält. 2. Jene Existenz war auch bestimmt als *Möglichkeit* oder als das *Ansichsein*, aber eines Andern. Indem es sich also aufhebt, so wird auch dies *Ansichsein* aufgehoben und geht in *Wirklichkeit* über. – Diese Bewegung der sich selbst aufhebenden realen Möglichkeit bringt also *dieselben schon vorhandenen Momente* hervor, nur jedes aus dem andern werdend; sie ist daher in dieser Negation auch nicht ein *Übergehen* sondern ein *Zusammengehen mit sich selbst*. – Nach der formellen Möglichkeit war darum, weil etwas möglich war, auch – nicht *es selbst* sondern – sein *Anderes* möglich. Die reale Möglichkeit hat nicht mehr ein *solches Anderes* sich gegenüber, denn sie ist real, insofern sie selbst auch die Wirklichkeit ist. Indem sich also die *unmittelbare Existenz* derselben, der Kreis der Bedingungen, aufhebt, so macht sie sich zum *Ansichsein*, welches sie selbst schon ist, nämlich als das *Ansichsein* eines Andern. Und indem umgekehrt dadurch zugleich ihr Moment des *Ansichseins* sich aufhebt, wird sie zur Wirklichkeit. also zu dem Momente, das sie gleichfalls selbst schon ist. – Was verschwindet, ist damit dies, daß die Wirklichkeit bestimmt war als die Möglichkeit oder das *Ansichsein* eines Andern, und umgekehrt die Möglichkeit als eine Wirklichkeit, die *nicht diejenige* ist, deren Möglichkeit sie ist.

In the self-sublating real possibility there is now a doubling that is being sublated, for it is itself a doubling, being both actuality and possibility. 1. Its actuality is the formal kind, that is, an existence which appears as something independent and immediate, and which, through its sublation, comes to be a reflected being, or the moment of something else. To this extent it contains *being-in-itself* within it. 2. That existence was also determined to be a *possibility* (or the *being-in-itself*), but of something else. In that it thus sublates itself, this being-in-itself is also sublated and passes over into actuality. – This movement of the self-sublating real possibility thus produces *the same moments we have already considered*, only each [moment] now comes to be from the other. So in this negation, the possibility is not a *passing over* but a *going together with itself*. – According to formal possibility, because something was possible, it was – not *itself* but – its *other* that was possible. Real possibility no longer has *such an other* over against it, for it is real to the extent that it is itself also actuality. Since, therefore, its *immediate existence* – the circle of conditions – sublates itself, it makes itself into the *being-in-itself* it already is, namely the *being-in-itself* of something else. And conversely, since its moment of being-in-itself is thereby sublated, it comes to be actuality; that is to say, it comes to be the moment which it similarly already is. – What thus disappears is this: that the actuality was determined to be the possibility or the being-in-itself of *something else*; and conversely, that the possibility is determined to be an actuality which is *not the one*, whose possibility it is.

When we recall all the steps through which we have moved in explicating real possibility, we discover a double process of cancelling. In the first place, the immediate actuality of the possible is cancelled as significant, and it is seen primarily as the possibility of another – as what that other is in itself. But in the second place we have now seen that its character as possible cannot be maintained. At the very point where it is really possible as the condition for another, it ceases to be possibility and becomes the resultant actual. Its possibility is cancelled in turn. The resultant actuality *is* the immediate being of real possibility.

As a result of speculative reflection it has become impossible to distinguish possibility and actuality. In the earlier discussion, where possibility was simple self-identity, the opposite of what was actual was also possible. Here, however, once all the conditions which make a thing possible are present, nothing else is possible. The actuality of these conditions is simply their actuality *as* conditions. But until they are all assembled,

they are not yet conditions. So the actuality of the possible as possible cannot now be distinguished from what is actualized by the possible.

When reflective thought turned to that possibility that is the ground of real actuality, it began by distinguishing the one from the other. But in the last analysis, having worked through all the speculative implications, it can no longer draw any clear distinctions at all. Simply as one condition among many, something cannot be a *real* possibility. As the totality of conditions, it can only arbitrarily be distinguished from what was to be grounded. Because the distinct senses of real actuality and real possibility slip so easily into one another, the whole pattern of meaning collapses into a unity, which must now have its speculative sense explained.

3. Die *Negation* der realen Möglichkeit ist somit *ihre Identität* mit sich; indem sie so in ihrem Aufheben der Gegenstoß dieses Aufhebens in sich selbst ist, ist sie die *reale Notwendigkeit*.

Was notwendig ist, kann *nicht anders* sein; aber wohl was überhaupt *möglich* ist; denn die Möglichkeit ist das Ansichsein, das nur Gesetztsein und daher wesentlich Anderssein ist. Die formelle Möglichkeit ist diese Identität als Übergehen in schlechthin anderes; die reale aber, weil sie das andere Moment, die Wirklichkeit, an ihr hat, ist schon selbst die Notwendigkeit. Was daher real möglich ist, das kann nicht mehr anders sein; unter diesen Bedingungen und Umständen kann nicht etwas anderes erfolgen. Reale Möglichkeit und die Notwendigkeit sind daher nur *scheinbar* unterschieden; diese ist eine Identität, die nicht erst *wird* sondern schon *vorausgesetzt* ist und zugrunde liegt. Die reale Notwendigkeit ist daher *inhaltsvolle* Beziehung; denn der Inhalt ist jene ansichseiende Identität, die gegen die Formunterschiede gleichgültig ist.

3. The *negation* of real possibility is thus *its identity* with itself. Since in its sublation it is the counter-thrust of this sublation into itself, it is *real necessity*.

What is necessary *cannot be otherwise*; but is yet what is *possible* in general. For possibility is the being-in-itself which is only something posited, and so essentially otherness. Formal possibility is this identity as transition into something quite other. Because, however, real possibility has the other moment – actuality – within itself, it is already itself necessity. So what is really possible can no longer be something else; under these conditions and circumstances nothing else can follow. Real possibility and necessity are thus only *apparently* distinct. We have

here an identity that does not just *come to be*, but it is already presupposed and is laid as a foundation. Real necessity is thus a relation *full of content*; for the content is that identity which is in itself and which is indifferent to the distinctions of form.

What is really possible in any complete sense *must* be actual. As that possibility that can do nothing else but become actual, it is necessary. This sense of 'necessity' is different from the earlier, formal one. For there we saw that the contingent actuality which is both grounded and groundless is other than formal possibility per se. Here, however, real possibility is itself the necessary. "Under these conditions and circumstances," we say, "nothing else can follow." The distinction between real possibility and necessity is only apparent. When we say that something is really necessary, we include in that necessity all the content that constitutes and characterizes that something – the content originally included in the determinate sense of 'real possibility.'

Diese Notwendigkeit aber ist zugleich *relativ*. – Sie hat nämlich eine *Voraussetzung*, von der sie anfängt, sie hat an dem *Zufälligen* ihren *Ausgangspunkt*. Das reale Wirkliche als solches ist nämlich das *bestimmte* Wirkliche und hat zunächst seine *Bestimmtheit* als *unmittelbares* Sein darin, daß es eine Mannigfaltigkeit existierender Umstände ist; aber dies unmittelbare Sein als Bestimmtheit, ist es auch das *Negative* seiner, ist Ansichsein oder Möglichkeit; so ist es reale Möglichkeit. Als diese Einheit der beiden Momente ist sie Totalität der Form, aber *die sich noch äußerliche* Totalität; sie ist so Einheit der Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit, daß 1. die mannigfaltige Existenz *unmittelbar* oder *positiv* die Möglichkeit ist, – eine Mögliches, mit sich Identisches überhaupt, darum weil sie ein Wirkliches ist; 2. insofern diese Möglichkeit der Existenz gesetzt ist, ist sie bestimmt als *nur* Möglichkeit, als unmittelbares Umschlagen der Wirklichkeit in ihr Gegenteil, – oder als *Zufälligkeit*. Daher ist diese Möglichkeit, welche die unmittelbare Wirklichkeit, indem sie Bedingung ist, an ihr hat, nur das Ansichsein als die Möglichkeit eines *Andern*. Dadurch daß, wie gezeigt, dies Anderssein sich aufhebt und dies Gesetzsein selbst gesetzt wird, wird die reale Möglichkeit zwar Notwendigkeit; aber diese fängt somit von jener noch nicht in sich reflektierten Einheit des Möglichen und Wirklichen an; – dieses *Voraussetzen* und die in sich *zurückkehrende Bewegung* ist noch getrennt; – oder die *Notwendigkeit* hat sich noch nicht *aus sich selbst zur Zufälligkeit bestimmt*.

Die Relativität der realen Notwendigkeit stellt sich an dem *Inhalte* so dar, daß er nur erst die gegen die Form gleichgültige Identität, daher von ihr unterschieden und ein *bestimmter Inhalt* überhaupt ist. Das real Notwendige ist deswegen irgendeine beschränkte Wirklichkeit, die um dieser Beschränktheit willen in anderer Rücksicht auch nur ein *Zufälliges* ist.

This necessity is at the same time *relative*. – It has, namely, a *presupposition* from which it begins; it has *contingency* as its starting point. Real actuality as such is a *determinate* actuality and has initially its *determination* as *immediate* being by virtue of the fact that it is a multiplicity of existing circumstances. Yet having this immediate being as determination it is also its own *negative* – being-in-itself or possibility. In this way it is real possibility. As this unity of both moments it is a formal totality, but a totality *which is still external to itself*. It unites possibility and actuality in such a way that: 1. the manifold existence is *immediately* or *positively* the possibility – a possible, something in general identical with itself, only because it is something actual. 2. To the extent that this possibility of existence is posited, it is determined to be *only* possible, to be the immediate conversion of actuality into its opposite, – in other words, to be *contingency*. In this way this possibility, which has immediate actuality within itself to the extent that it is a condition, is only being-in-itself as the possibility of *something else*. By the fact that, as we have seen, this otherness sublates itself, and this being posited itself becomes posited, real possibility indeed comes to be necessity; but this latter starts out from that unity of the possible and the actual which is not yet reflected into itself. This *presupposition* and the *movement which returns back* into itself are still separated. In other words, *necessity has not yet determined itself to be contingency out of itself*.

The relativity of real necessity is displayed with reference to the *content* in such a way that it is initially only that identity which is indifferent to the form, distinct from it, and so *some determinate content* in general. Real necessity is therefore some delimited actuality or other which, because of this limitation, is also in other respects simply something *contingent*.

Real necessity is relative. It is based upon a presupposition, which is itself contingent. By this Hegel is not simply making the obvious point that our reflection on the implications of the meaning of 'contingency' has led us to this sense of 'real necessity,' so that the former is the premise

for the reflective procedure. Rather it is implicit in the content of our discussion itself. We began by thinking the concept 'real actuality' – immediate, but determinate reality. Real necessity concerns the relation between real possibility as condition, and this real actuality as conditioned. That set of conditions is taken as given. And it is contingent matter what happens to have been found there. Once the set of actual conditions is present, the resulting actual must emerge. But the necessary relationship as such tells us nothing about why we have this particular set, rather than some other. On the one hand, the content in its totality determines the necessary relationship between a real possibility and the resulting actuality. On the other hand, the particular set of conditions that makes up the content could have been otherwise.

One cannot think of real necessity, then, without presupposing contingency. The relation is necessary but the content is contingent. Because of real possibility *A*, *B* must become actual. But that necessity is contingent on the specific determinations of *A*.

In der Tat ist somit die *reale Notwendigkeit an sich* auch *Zufälligkeit*. – Dies erscheint zunächst so, daß das real Notwendige der *Form nach* zwar ein Notwendiges, aber dem Inhalte nach ein Beschränktes sei und durch ihn seine Zufälligkeit habe. Allein auch in der Form der realen Notwendigkeit ist die Zufälligkeit enthalten; denn wie sich gezeigt, ist die reale Möglichkeit nur *an sich* das Notwendige, gesetzt aber ist sie als das *Anderssein* der Wirklichkeit und Möglichkeit gegeneinander. Die reale Notwendigkeit enthält daher die Zufälligkeit; sie ist die Rückkehr in sich aus jenem unruhigen *Anderssein* der Wirklichkeit und Möglichkeit gegeneinander, aber nicht aus sich selbst zu sich.

An sich ist also hier die Einheit der Notwendigkeit und Zufälligkeit vorhanden; diese Einheit ist die *absolute Wirklichkeit* zu nennen.

Thus *real necessity* is in fact also *contingency*. – This initially appears such that what is really necessary is indeed necessary *according to its form*, but according to its content it is something limited, and thereby acquires its contingency. However contingency is contained as well in the form of real necessity. For as we have seen, real possibility is only *implicitly* the necessary; as posited it is to be the *otherness* of actuality and possibility over against each other. Real necessity thus contains contingency; it is the return into itself of that restless *otherness* of actuality and possibility over against each other, but not the return out of itself into itself.

We have here *implicitly* the unity of necessity and contingency presented to us. This unity is to be called *absolute actuality*.

Not only is the content of the necessary relation contingent, but so is the relation itself. For the distinction between real possibility and the resultant actual is the result of reflection on the actual. But that reflective distinction is itself contingent and not inevitable. What thought distinguishes as the real possibility of an actual is not itself determined with necessity. In terms of both content and form, real necessity presupposes contingency.

What we have, then, is a unity of necessity and contingency. Contingency is implicit in real necessity in so far as it is determinate and in so far as it requires, as a necessary condition, the reflective distinction between possibility and actuality.

To understand 'real necessity' requires the distinction between real possibility and its actualization, even though this distinction cannot be maintained. Just as, however, thought moved from contingency to formal necessity by shifting the stress from the implicit relation of explicitly distinct terms to the explicit integration of reciprocal implications, so here understanding can collapse into a unity those moments that constitute real necessity. When thought no longer holds apart the distinctions between real possibility and real actuality, it takes the mutual interrelationship in its totality. We now have a new sense of 'actuality.' Whatever is actual in this sense is simply actual, for the reference to a distinct possibility that grounds it is no longer appropriate. What thought now thinks is an actuality that has no external possibility in terms of which it is conditioned. Since there is no other, relative to which it becomes actual, it is absolute actuality.

C. Absolute necessity

Die reale Notwendigkeit ist *bestimmte* Notwendigkeit; die formelle hat noch keinen Inhalt und Bestimmtheit an ihr. Die *Bestimmtheit* der Notwendigkeit besteht darin, daß sie ihre Negation, die Zufälligkeit, an ihr hat. So hat sie sich ergeben.

Die Bestimmtheit aber in *ihrer ersten Einfachheit* ist Wirklichkeit; die *bestimmte* Notwendigkeit ist daher unmittelbar *wirkliche Notwendigkeit*. Diese Wirklichkeit, *die selbst als solche notwendig ist*, indem sie nämlich die Notwendigkeit als ihr *Ansichsein* enthält, ist *absolute*

Wirklichkeit; – Wirklichkeit, die nicht mehr anders sein kann, denn ihr *Ansichsein* ist nicht die Möglichkeit, sondern die Notwendigkeit.

Real necessity is a *determinate* necessity; formal necessity still has connected with it no content or determination. The *determination* of necessity consists in the fact that it has within itself its negation, that is, contingency. This is what has resulted so far.

In its first simplicity, however, this determination is actuality. As a result, *determinate* necessity is immediately *actual necessity*. This actuality, which indeed is *as such necessary* in that it contains necessity as its *being-in-itself*, is *absolute actuality* – an actuality which can no longer be anything else, since its being-in-itself is not possibility but necessity.

(1) As we have seen, real necessity has a determinate content. This makes up its contingency. But any such determination must in the first instance be actual. So we are now thinking of an actual that is inherently necessary. Since it cannot be otherwise, it is an absolute actuality. Whereas earlier ‘possibility’ was the term we used for the inner being of the actual, now we have to put ‘necessity’ in its place.

To understand this move it is useful to recall our earlier conclusions. In section **A**, the contingent, as both grounded and groundless, could not be distinguished from the formally necessary. In section **B**, real necessity, both in content and in form, is contingently determined. These two moments come together in thought into a contingency that is necessary and a necessity that is contingent. When we collapse this double movement into a single concept, we find ourselves thinking of a kind of actuality that is constituted internally by a network of necessary relations. To say that it is absolute is to say that it needs reference to no external possibility to explain it.

Aber damit ist diese *Wirklichkeit*, – weil sie gesetzt ist, *absolut*, d.h. selbst die Einheit ihrer und der Möglichkeit zu sein, – nur eine leere Bestimmung, oder sie ist *Zufälligkeit*. – Dies Leere ihrer Bestimmung macht sie zu einer *bloßen Möglichkeit*, zum einem, das ebenso sehr auch *anders* sein und als Mögliches bestimmt werden kann, Diese Möglichkeit aber ist selbst die *absolute*, denn sie ist eben die Möglichkeit, ebenso sehr als Möglichkeit wie als Wirklichkeit bestimmt zu werden. Damit, daß sie diese Gleichgültigkeit gegen sich selbst ist, ist sie gesetzt als *leere, zufällige* Bestimmung.

But because this *actuality* is posited *to be absolute*, that is, *to be the union of itself and possibility*, its characterization as actual is only an *empty* determination – it is itself *contingency*. The *emptiness* of this determination makes it into a *bare possibility*, into something that could just as easily be something else and determined to be possible. This possibility is equally *absolute*, for it is the kind of possibility that becomes determinate by being as much possibility as actuality. Since it is this pure indifference with regard to itself, it is posited as an *empty, contingent* determination.

(2) Absolute actuality, then, has no possibility other than, or distinct from, its actuality. Its ground is its necessity. Yet understanding still asks the question: why? Since we can now neither talk of formal self-identity, nor distinguish some actual from those others that render it possible, we can only inquire why there is anything at all. The ground that is sought in this question is empty of all content, for all determinate possibilities have collapsed into the absolutely actual. Therefore there is no answer to this reflective question. It is completely contingent that there be anything at all. It could have been absolutely otherwise.

When dialectic leads us to this possibility, no longer are we thinking the formal possibility of simple self-identity, nor indeed the real possibility of conditions. It is the possibility which reason entertains when it confronts the actual as necessary and absolute. But such possibilities either remain a pure possibility with no actualization at all, or become the possibility of what is, in fact, actual. There is no reason why it should be one rather than the other.

We are again faced with a speculative tension. What is absolutely actual is intrinsically necessary, yet it is completely contingent. On the one hand it is grounded in necessity because there is no distinct possibility to which we can turn. On the other hand it is grounded in absolute possibility which is independent of any reference to what has become actual.

So enthält die reale Notwendigkeit nicht nur *an sich* die Zufälligkeit, sondern diese *wird* auch an ihr; aber dies *Werden* als die Äußerlichkeit ist selbst nur das *Ansichsein* derselben, weil es nur ein *unmittelbares Bestimmtsein* ist. Aber es ist nicht nur dies, sondern *ihr eigenes Werden*, – oder die *Voraussetzung*, welche sie hatte, ist ihr eigenes Setzen. Denn als reale Notwendigkeit ist sie das Aufgehobensein der Wirklichkeit in der Möglichkeit und umgekehrt; – indem sie dies *einfache Umschlagen* des einen dieser Momente in das andere ist, ist sie

auch ihre einfache *positive Einheit*, indem jedes, wie sich zeigte, in dem andern nur *mit sich selbst zusammengeht*. So ist sie aber die *Wirklichkeit*; jedoch eine solche, die nur ist als dieses einfache Zusammengehen der Form mit sich selbst. Ihr negatives Setzen jener Momente ist dadurch selbst *das Voraussetzen* oder Setzen *ihrer selbst als aufgehobener*, oder der *Unmittelbarkeit*.

Real necessity does not simply contain contingency *implicitly*, but this *also comes to be* within it. Yet this *coming to be* as a kind of externality is at the same time its own *being-in-itself*, since it is only an *immediate determination*. Even this does not capture it, for it is *its own coming to be*. In other words, the presupposition which it has is the result of its own positing. After all, as real necessity it is the sublating of actuality into possibility and vice versa. As the *simple inversion* of the one moment into the other, it is equally their simple *positive unity*, for, as we have seen, each in collapsing into the other *collapses only into itself*. In this way it is *actuality*, but of a kind that is only this simple formal collapsing into itself. Its negative positing of those moments is thus itself *the presupposing* or positing *of itself as sublated* or of *immediacy*.

(3) This speculative contradiction requires resolution and explanation. Since there is no further external point of reference to provide such an explanation, understanding must reconsider the earlier argument in light of this new development. The concept of absolute actuality was the result of collapsing the distinctions in the concept of real necessity. The latter distinguished between real possibilities and the resultant actualities. Only on the basis of this distinction does real necessity become possible. Since this distinction was collapsed into the concept of absolute actuality, it is implicit within it. What is thus hidden in the concept of absolute actuality needs now to be brought to light. The distinction between possible and actual is reintroduced, not as a relation of contrary opposites where both cannot be present at the same time, but as a relation of sub-contraries whose meanings are distinct and different, but which are yet explicitly related within a larger universe of discourse. In place of the earlier moves of thought which first treated the distinctions as explicit and the relations as only implicit, and then shifted to collapsing the distinctions into an explicit unity, understanding now recognizes the necessity of taking both the distinctions and the relations as components of the meaning of the concept. On the one hand, the two moments of possibility and actuality are distinguished as

the negation of each other; on the other, this negative relation is negated to reaffirm the unity.

Eben darin aber ist diese Wirklichkeit bestimmt als Negatives; sie ist ein Zusammengehen aus der Wirklichkeit, welche reale Möglichkeit war, mit sich; also wird diese neue Wirklichkeit nur aus ihrem Ansichsein, aus *der Negation ihrer selbst*. – Damit ist sie zugleich unmittelbar als *Möglichkeit* bestimmt, als *Vermitteltes* durch ihre Negation. Diese Möglichkeit aber ist somit unmittelbar nichts als *dies Vermitteln*, in welchem das Ansichsein, nämlich sie selbst und die Unmittelbarkeit, beide auf gleiche Weise *Gesetztsein* sind. – So ist es die Notwendigkeit, welche ebensosehr Aufheben dieses Gesetztseins oder Setzen der *Unmittelbarkeit* und des *Ansichseins*, so wie eben darin *Bestimmen* dieses Aufhebens als *Gesetztseins* ist. Sie ist daher *es selbst*, welche sich als *Zufälligkeit* bestimmt, – in ihrem Sein sich von sich abstößt, in diesem Abstoßen selbst nur in sich zurückgekehrt ist und in dieser Rückkehr als ihrem Sein sich von sich selbst abgestoßen hat.

Just for this reason this actuality is determined as negative. It is a collapsing into itself out of the actuality which real possibility was. Thus this new actuality comes to be only out of its being-in-itself – out of *the negation of itself*. Thereby it is as much determined immediately to be *possibility* as to be *mediated* through its negation. However, this possibility is thereby immediately nothing else but *this mediating*, in which the being-in-itself, that is, itself and the immediacy, are both in the same way *posited entities*. – In this way it is necessity, which is just as much the sublating of this posited character – the positing of *immediacy* and of *being-in-itself* – as the *determining* of this sublating to be *something posited*. In other words, it is necessity *itself*, which determines itself to be *contingency*: in its very being it repels itself from itself; in this very repelling it only returns back into itself; and in this return as [in] its being it has repelled itself from itself.

This new content of thought is what is actual period. No longer do we contrast immediate or formal actuality with reflective considerations of its logical possibility. Nor do we distinguish determinate actuality from its real conditions. Nor indeed do we think of absolute actuality as simply necessary in itself. We are instead thinking of the actual as it actually is. Its actual determinations result from the internal relations between actuals and possibles, in which both are constituted as distinct and then related to each other as part to whole. In other words, possibility is

established as the opposite of the actual through the reflective determination of distinctions within the actual itself.

In this context, the process by which reflection distinguishes the possible from the actual mediates and grounds the actual. The distinction and its resolution actualize and render determinate what the actual is implicitly. It is the *possibility* of the actual in a final and preeminent sense. Instead of thinking abstractly about absolute possibilities, understanding individuates the mediating process which makes it possible for the actual to determine itself.

Indeed, this mediating possibility is at the same time necessity, since it continually cancels every attempt to posit immediacy as something inherent, while also determining that all such immediacy be posited. In other words, it creates contingency even as it integrates it into a pattern of relationships.

So hat die *Form* in ihrer Realisierung alle ihre Unterschiede durchdrungen und sich durchsichtig gemacht und ist als *absolute Notwendigkeit* nur diese einfache *Identität des Seins in seiner Negation* oder in dem *Wesen mit sich selbst*. Der Unterschied von dem *Inhalte* und der Form selbst ist ebenso verschwunden; denn jene Einheit der Möglichkeit in der Wirklichkeit und umgekehrt ist die in ihrer Bestimmtheit oder im Gesetzsein gegen sich selbst gleichgültige *Form, die inhaltsvolle Sache*, an der sich die Form der Notwendigkeit äußerlich verlief. Aber so ist sie diese *reflektierte* Identität beider Bestimmungen als gegen sie *gleichgültig*, somit die Formbestimmung des *Ansichseins* gegen das *Gesetzsein*, und diese Möglichkeit macht die Beschränktheit des Inhalts aus, den die reale Notwendigkeit hatte. Die Auflösung dieses Unterschieds aber ist die absolute Notwendigkeit, deren Inhalt dieser in ihr sich durchdringende Unterschied ist.

With this the *form*, in its progressive realization, has penetrated all its differences and made itself transparent. As *absolute necessity* it is only this simple *identity with itself of being in its negation* or in *essence*. The distinction between *content* and form has thus disappeared, for that unity of possibility in actuality and vice versa is the *form* which is indifferent to itself in its determination or its being posited; it is *reality full of content*, on the surface of which the form of necessity runs its course. Yet it is this *reflected* identity of both determinations as *indifferent* to it, as well as having the formal determination of *being-in-itself* indifferent to them *being posited*. This possibility constitutes the limitation in content which real necessity possessed. The dissolving of

this difference is absolute necessity, whose content is this internal self-penetrating difference.

Thus understanding shows that 'the actual,' as we are now thinking the term, constitutes itself as determinate by means of the relation in which possibility grounds actuality, and actuality is grounded by possibility. At the same time it generates that relation as the explicit form of its implicit character. By thus constituting its own ground – as self-constituting – it is absolutely necessary. Thus absolute necessity contains contingency within it as the ground of its own necessity. For it is contingent which moments are distinguished, separated and repelled from its actuality to become its conditions. Nonetheless, whatever moments are thus rendered determinate, it is necessary that they become the means of achieving its absolute self-determination. Without these contingent, determinate moments, absolute necessity could not be established as necessary. They make it possible. This play of countervailing forces determines the actual to be necessary by annulling, even while establishing, contingency. It generates, even as it transcends, the repelling moment of contrast and counterthrust. This necessity is necessity absolute. For it alone establishes the absolute necessity of contingency.

At this point we shall stop our exposition of the text. For we have accomplished our purpose. We have shown how Hegel links together contingency with necessity. On the most basic level, whatever is contingent, simply because it is, cannot be otherwise, and is thus formally necessary. At a more complex level, the relative necessity, in which a set of conditions are sufficient to require some resulting actuality, is itself contingent, dependent on the particular content contained in those conditions. It is determined by its presuppositions, all of which precede, and are thus independent of, its own necessary relationship. Finally, whenever we consider the actual world as a totality on its own, we find it to be a world within which determinate actualities emerge and become necessary and sufficient conditions for other actualities, but whatever does in fact emerge is permeated by contingency. This is the nature of necessity when we consider the total picture – what Hegel calls 'absolute necessity' – and it requires, as a defining feature of its complex dynamic, that there be contingencies. It is not simply that it is a contingent matter that there be a something rather than nothing. Rather, it is absolutely necessary that, within this all-encompassing sphere of actuality, the constant emergence of contingencies be as central to its life as the networks of conditioning relationships. That is to say, in Hegel's understanding of the world, contingency is absolutely necessary.

3

Secondness

If contingencies are a necessity, then we need to rethink what is meant by knowledge.¹ From the time of Plato, real knowledge is to be no mere acquaintance with facts, but rather to comprehend the universals that govern the way facts come to be. Even if we no longer pay lip service to Plato's theory of ideas, we nonetheless assume that true knowledge comes about once we grasp the laws that determine how the world functions. It is this understanding of the structure of universal possibles that governs all our scientific investigation of the natural and social world.

What happens once we recognize that contingencies are critical? Universals and laws still may play a role, but our understanding also requires that contingent facts be incorporated into a full explanation. Indeed, such "accidents" may from time to time call in question the universal applicability of our general rules. As a result, simply thinking in terms of laws will never give us final knowledge about the nature of things. Some, indeed, go so far as to claim that knowledge is in fact impossible: there is no such thing as Truth, with a capital T.

It would seem that Hegel is not prepared to make such a radical move. After all, in Hegel's system the *Phenomenology of Spirit* takes the place of traditional epistemology; and the ultimate destination for its long odyssey is a chapter called "Absolute Knowing." The implication is that, once we have followed through all its deviations and detours, we shall come to the point where we know the Truth of everything that is. In his introduction to this work he sets out the program: genuine knowledge integrates certainty and truth: once we reach our goal of absolute knowledge we shall be certain of the truth. To be sure, the journey passes by way of life and death struggles, the single-minded pursuit of pleasure, Sophocles's *Antigone*, the reign of terror and the crucified death of the Christian god. But all of these are situated within the parentheses of that final chapter

and that introduction. Somehow or other, he suggests, all the intermediate stages are part of our human quest for complete knowledge, for grasping the universals that govern everything.

In addition, the same introduction claims that one can discover in that long itinerary an inherent necessity. Each stage in some way or other is the required consequence of what happened previously. Whenever we approach this claim from the perspective initiated by Plato, we see it as affirming traditional epistemology. Somehow or other it is inherent within human existence that we must follow this particular path in this particular way. Within all of the various episodes are implicit universal possibilities or laws that must necessarily be instantiated in experience and history. Contingencies are irrelevant.

For many critics, Hegel's claim to absolute knowledge is an absurdity. How can he seriously maintain that there is a kind of human cognition able to grasp all that is – if not in fact, at least in principle. Absolute knowledge, it is assumed, is a way of grasping the implicit principles – or possibilities – that underlie everything that is. It is as much the content of true possibilities as it is the form of absolute certainty. But to hold that we humans can reach such wisdom seems to be the ultimate expression of human pride.

This reading is, I would suggest, the result in part of a mistranslation of the title of Hegel's last chapter. The German is "*Das absolute Wissen.*" That noun does not name a simple state of affairs; for it is an infinitive, with a verbal force.² Rather than talking about *what* is known, Hegel is here talking about *how* we know – the kind of knowing that can be certain of getting at the truth of things.

With that shift in perspective, we quickly recognize that Hegel is not alone in claiming to possess an absolute kind of knowing. When Descartes appeals to clear and distinct ideas he is maintaining that this is the way we can be certain of the truth. When John Locke reduces all concepts to the givens of sensations and reflection, he is declaring that this alone is the way we can know the world as it really is. Both are making absolute claims about the way we know; and both are excluding alternative possibilities.³ The list could be extended: Kant's critical epistemology, the romantics' intuitive certainty, Linnaeus's biological classification, Einstein's confidence that "god does not play dice." Indeed, we can begin to see why Hegel includes points of view that seem far removed from traditional epistemology: the master's confidence that he has discovered what it means to be human; the conviction of the unhappy consciousness that it lacks all changeless truth and must mortify itself completely before enlightenment can take place; Antigone's determination that the gods of

the family must be appeased, and Creon's insistence that the laws of the political order must be obeyed; Robespierre's strategy for removing all self-interested activity from the state, and the calm conviction of conscientious individuals that what they grasp as the moral thing to do is inevitably right; the Persian belief that the world is an emanation of the sun, and the Greek belief that our destiny is determined by fate. All these positions are affirmed with absolute certainty: "This is the Truth." All make claims to a kind of knowing that cannot fail.

Yet, since the time of Socrates, irony has been a component of philosophical thinking and writing. If Hegel is serious when he says in the *Logic* that absolute necessity requires contingencies – requires actualities that could have been otherwise – then we need to rethink our understanding of what is going on within the *Phenomenology*. For he may be suggesting, ironically, that the absolute knowledge philosophers have been seeking throughout the ages is in fact a knowing that expects contingencies – that it can never anticipate with certainty what the world will be like.

Before venturing into that process of rethinking, I would like to introduce some vocabulary from the philosophy of C.S. Peirce, the American philosopher. Peirce has three categories: pervasive immediacy, or firstness; brute fact, or secondness; and mediation, or thirdness. Secondness is whatever confronts an immediate quality as a resistant other. Such brute facts trigger thought's mediation. For Peirce, fact cannot be reduced to the pure possibilities of firstness, nor is it simply an instantiation of the thirdness of generality. Its characteristic result is a measure of surprise. It is *not* what we expected. The task of thirdness is to take that novelty and integrate it into a framework of meaning such that it would no longer surprise us. That framework of possibilities provides the setting for a new qualitative perspective. Possibilities, then, emerge out of our encounter with the secondness of actualities.⁴

Let us apply this framework to Hegel's project as stated in his Introduction. Central to his thesis is that, as philosophers, we do not need to have a prior criterion or standard by which to judge claims to certain knowledge. Each claim contains its own standard by which it measures its success. For when we are certain, we are confident about what we can expect: any "truth" must capture what is essential about reality. So this particular assurance must correspond with whatever is; and the world we encounter must match our expectations. However, we find out whether they do in fact correspond only when we put these theories into practice – in our *experience* of actuals. Most of the time, if not always, we discover that there is a critical discrepancy. In other words, brutal encounters with secondness reveal that our confident certainties

do not match the “truth” of the way things are. Because our experiences do not conform to our confident expectations, we have to find a new set of expectations – a new kind of certainty – more likely to capture the truth. For our ultimate goal is to find a kind of certainty that will never be surprised by secondness. Once we find it, Hegel implies, we will have reached absolute knowing.

What Hegel has done in the *Phenomenology*, then, is to show that every absolute claim to knowledge he considers is a kind of firstness, a confident set of immediate convictions. Each, however, falls afoul of brute facts. The secondness of experience disrupts its world and reduces it to despair. The first title for this book, after all, was “Science of the *Experience* of Consciousness”; and “experience” names that dynamic whereby we learn from what happens; where contingencies disrupt our expectation of what is genuinely possible. Through experience we take account of secondness.

In his Introduction, Hegel allows that there is a variety of responses to these moments of failure. One can maintain that our original insights hold, and that it is the evil manipulations of others or inappropriate reflection that have frustrated our plans. One can say that anything can be true as long as one sincerely believes it to be so. Or one can throw up one’s hands in despair and say that there is no such thing as knowledge after all. None of these strategies, he suggests, will ultimately satisfy. For we cannot permanently remain in thoughtless indolence, ignoring whatever happens; nor can we consistently hold that sincere beliefs, which usually disagree and vary and are frequently confronted with failure, are all equally valid; and as for those who abandon all knowledge and withdraw into the simplicity of self-certainty, we may leave them to their own devices, for they are no longer concerned with what anyone else says.⁵

There is, however, another alternative. In developing this, Hegel applies the understanding of necessity that emerged from his *Logic*. Each time failure confronts us, we need to reconsider, not only how the contingencies have emerged, but the conditioning relationships that hold between those contingencies and our expectations. In Peirce’s language, we move on from the disruption of secondness to the mediation of thirdness.

To be sure, he does not hold that this new move is consciously engineered by the one who experiences the failure. Rather, he suggests, new stages simply emerge in human history. Only when we look back with the benefit of experience (and the reflective arsenal of logical thought) can we recognize the way a new kind of absolute claim incorporates the results of an earlier encounter with secondness. Because we have the new,

speculative sense of necessity, we can discover how our human spirit has brought together failed expectation and surprising contingency into a new kind of confident claim to knowledge. And so we can discern the systematic pattern that underlies the whole panorama of human history and experience, and in particular its ongoing sequence of confident claims to absolute ways of knowing.

I shall support this reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology* with three extended discussions. First, I shall illustrate the role secondness and contingency play in the most basic knowledge claim – that of sense certainty. One could proceed to develop a full commentary in which every one of the stages is considered on detail, but that would stretch the bounds of our project into a lifetime occupation. Second, in the next chapter, I shall take up Hegel's observation that the odyssey of the spirit is a pathway of despair.⁶ This will involve a detailed examination of a passage in his discussion of Revealed Religion that talks about the agony of spirit. Third, I shall turn to the final chapter on Absolute Knowing to identify what in fact is involved in Hegel's own claim to certainty, and how it is able not only to unite certainty with truth, but also to incorporate contingency.

Let me begin, then, by discussing the first chapter of the *Phenomenology*. Hegel starts his discussion of sense certainty with the following words: "The concrete content of sense certainty lets itself appear immediately as the richest cognition, yes, as a cognition of infinite richness." The inexhaustible riches of this stage, far from evoking something transcendent, come from the *concrete* content of *sense* certainty. Hegel's attention is focussed on what we see, hear, feel, touch and smell – the brute givenness of concrete qualities. And this is to be presented directly to our consciousness without any mediation of thought. For "immediately" is the critical word in that sentence. We are to isolate and identify what is simply presented to us quite apart from any meddling by our conscious or sub-conscious thoughts. There is to be no ordering of such sensations into objective things with properties (which will become the theme of the next chapter on Perception) nor any other kind of intervention. We are to rely on the unavoidable givenness of what *immediately* impinges on our consciousness. The claim being made, in other words, is that we shall know absolutely only by avoiding any mediation whatsoever; what is directly given fills the whole screen. And the concrete content of this kind of knowing can only be our immediate sensations. Any thought that might be used to organize them involves mediation and is to be completely excluded if we are to know in any proper sense.

Sense certainty fails as a claim to absolute knowledge because no concrete content endures *as immediate*. New content replaces what was there; and since what is no longer there is no longer immediate, it can no longer be the true as sense certainty understands it to be. Thus the pervasive immediacy of sensing (what Peirce would call its firstness) is confronted by the brute fact (or secondness) of novelty: night becomes noon; a house replaces a tree. What was true becomes false; and the false becomes true. The attempt to escape that inconsistency results in frantic appeals to other forms of immediacy, so that the absoluteness of this kind of certainty can be saved: to the *act* of seeing or hearing (rather than the content sensed), and when that fails in its turn, to the silence of simply pointing. In this final refusal to make any universal claim and simply immerse oneself in the present, there emerges the inescapable experience of reappropriating the memory of an immediate past into an emerging present. Pointing, it turns out, involves mediation, as an initial moment, which has already disappeared into the dark pit of the subconscious, is replaced by a second and has to be recalled from the past; then the pattern repeats itself, as the transient second is replaced by a third and then by a fourth in an ongoing process. Consciousness mediates among the various vanishing moments. Similarly a spot which starts out as the immediate focus of attention, is held in abeyance as one's focus expands to adjacent spots to the left and right, above and below, behind and before. When we point to what is immediately before us, we are constantly reconstituting the immediate past into our awareness of the new present in a process where the old, no longer immediate, mediates our appropriation of the new. In other words, the secondness of spatial and temporal experience frustrates the whole project of starting with pure, unadulterated immediacy. At this point we can no longer simply adopt a different strategy to maintain immediacy; for pure immediacy has proven to be radically transient. A completely new approach to knowing with certainty is required.

It is within this move – where we require a new kind of object because a new kind of knowledge claim is adopted – that Hegel situates the *scientific* claims of his phenomenological descriptions. “It usually seems to be the case ... that our experience of the untruth of our first notion comes *by way of a second* object which we come upon by chance and externally, so that our part in all this is simply the pure *apprehension* of what is in and of itself.” In contrast, a philosophical reconstruction shows that “in every case the result of an untrue mode of knowing must not be allowed to run away into an empty nothing, but must necessarily be grasped as the *nothing of that from which it results* – a result which contains what was true in

preceding knowledge.”⁷ The result is a mediating thirdness which unites the original claim with the secondness that confounds it.

So the stand of perception, which Hegel takes as the next stage, can be understood as containing what was true in sense certainty. The reference to pure immediacy has turned out to be false. But the intimate relation between immediacy and mediation that experience discovered as fact when we simply pointed to a spatial object, however small, over a temporal duration, however short, suggests, first, that there is an object present through a number of concrete immediates as each one mediates its successor – an object that is to that extent a universal; second, that this object is known by way of a sensing that in turn incorporates a continuous series of concrete immediates in which each one reconstitutes and so mediates the significance of its predecessor, perceiving its truth. In other words, perception takes account of both the project of sense certainty and the secondness of spatial and temporal experience which emerged when it was consistently put into practice.

What is important about this “moment of *being-in-itself* or *being-for-us* which is not present to the consciousness comprehended in the experience itself,” is not the content (which remains, albeit implicitly) but the form “as movement and a process of becoming.”⁸ Philosophers become aware of the way perception resolves the dilemma of sense certainty because they not only distinguish the moment of secondness from the firstness which it disrupted, but also see how each conditions the other within a new claim to absolute knowing. By combining the two, not in a static synthesis but as the unity of a reciprocal dynamic, we can, as philosophers, construct those connections that enable the progressive stages of the *Phenomenology* to be called a science.

Secondness or contingency is critical, then, at two stages. Initially it indicates the brute experiences that dialectically frustrate absolute claims to knowledge. But more critically, that frustration must be taken seriously as both conditioning that original claim and being conditioned by it. We need to investigate that mutual dependence if we are to understand how and why qualitatively new claims to absolute knowing emerge.

This is what makes Hegel's *Phenomenology* so fascinating. At each stage consciousness makes an absolute claim to knowledge: “This is the way we get to know things as they really are.” At each stage Hegel describes what happens as that knowledge claim is acted out in practice, when we actually try to know according to its prescriptions. And in each case, Hegel shows that what actually happens confounds our original confidence: immediacy is subverted by the mediation of space and time; the

distinctions between the universals we introduce and the universals of the thing to be known, rather than producing certainty, flicker back and forth like the images of a hologram; the independent self-certainty of the master turns out to be dependent on the slave; the quest for pure self-knowledge ends up in the self-mortification of unhappy consciousness, where the self completely alienates itself to the other. Contingencies transform absolute claims into relative conditions, which become only a part of some new claim. Even within what most people take to be knowledge, contingencies turn out to be necessary.

4

The 'Infinite Agony' of Despair

It is not our purpose to show how the contingency of secondness works its influence throughout the various stages of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. One illustration from the first chapter will have to suffice. Yet this influence underlies Hegel's suggestion that the pilgrimage consciousness has undertaken is a pathway of despair. The continuing frustration of confident expectations brought about by contingencies generates many dark moments, when the path forward seems to have evaporated. Nowhere is this more explicit than in a passage from the penultimate chapter on religion.¹

We shall set the context for this passage by referring to a letter Hegel wrote to Karl Joseph Windischmann from Nürnberg in 1810. When talking about his current research on magic, Windischmann had written Hegel that

for about two weeks I have in fact found myself in the worst of mental states. It was precipitated by an attack almost resembling apoplexy. My situation, which in any case is already painful, thus came to weigh on me like a rock in the chest. A profound hypochondria and semi-paralysis had taken hold of me, and everything I do and write disgusts me.²

Hegel replied as follows:

Consider yourself convinced that the frame of mind you describe to me is partly due to this present work of yours, to this descent into dark regions where nothing is revealed as fixed, definite and certain; where glimmerings of light flash everywhere but, flanked by abysses, are rather darkened in their brightness and led astray by the environment,

casting false reflections far more than illumination. Each onset of a new path breaks off again and ends in the indeterminable, losing itself, wresting us away from our purpose and direction. From my own experience I know this mood of the soul, or rather of reason, which arises when it has finally made its way with interest and hunches into a chaos of phenomena but, though inwardly certain of the goal, has not yet worked through them to clarity and to a detailed account of the whole. For a few years I suffered from this hypochondria to the point of exhaustion. Everybody probably has such a turning point in his life, the nocturnal point of the contraction of his essence in which he is forced through a narrow passage by which his confidence in himself and everyday life grows in strength and assurance – unless he has rendered himself incapable of being fulfilled by everyday life, in which case he is confirmed in an inner, nobler existence.³

Hegel does not see this hypochondria (or morbid depression) which “everybody probably has” as a matter of peculiar circumstances or some kind of abnormality. Indeed, he calls it a “mood of reason.” And so we should not be surprised when, in the final paragraphs of the section on Revealed Religion, close to the culminating chapter of the *Phenomenology*, he introduces “the agonizing feeling of unhappy consciousness that *God himself has died*.” This involves not only “the return of consciousness into the depth of the night where I equals I, which distinguishes and knows nothing else outside of itself,” but also “the loss of substance, the loss of its standing over against consciousness.” Here we have a description of that “descent into dark regions where nothing is revealed as fixed, definite and certain.” Yet here, too, we have it described as a narrow passage through which “confidence in oneself and everyday life grows in strength and assurance.” For the sentence that follows the description of the dark night talks about a knowing which has become spiritual, and a substance which has become subject – “actual, simple and universal self-consciousness.”⁴

The dark experiences which Windischmann and Hegel encountered, then, are not to be taken in the manner of our modern “psychologism” as abnormalities to be repressed or cured – states of depression to be dispelled with appropriate chemicals – but rather as transitions essential to the process of achieving absolute knowing. They do not represent a time of simply “feeling blue,” but rather emerge within the quest of reason for what is ultimately meaningful and significant about life and existence. For Hegel uses this kind of experience to differentiate the human spirit from simple animal life. In Paragraph 382 of the *Encyclopaedia*

Philosophy of Spirit, he writes that spirit “can bear the negation of its individual immediacy, that infinite agony. In other words, in this negativity it can maintain itself affirmatively and be identical on its own account.”⁵ What is the “individual immediacy” that is lost, other than the simple self-confidence of knowing what is significant in our life? And what is the negation that destroys its certainty, if it is not the emergence of contingencies that have not been anticipated.

In our exploration of the role of contingency in Hegel's philosophy, it is worth our while to reflect on this unexpected apotheosis of hypochondria and loss of meaning. For these episodes of depression surprise us as seeming to come out of nothing. They represent a radical encounter with contingency.

Our first task will be to explore in detail the crucial paragraph in the *Phenomenology* to determine what are its essential elements. Then we shall turn to three questions that it raises: Why is the experience triggered by the contingent death of a mediator? What is the nature of the spiritual transformation that leads from night to day? And finally how does this “infinite agony” define, for Hegel, the nature of spirit?

I

I start by providing my translation of the critical Paragraph 785 in the *Phenomenology*:

Thus what belongs to the element of *representation* – that the absolute spirit represents the nature of spirit in its being as *a singular* or rather as something *particular* – is now transplanted into self-consciousness itself – into a knowing that maintains itself in its otherness. This [self-consciousness] does not actually *die*, therefore, in the way the *particular one* has been represented as *actually* dying; but its particularity dies away into its universality, that is, into its *knowing* which is the essence⁶ reconciled with itself. So the immediately preceding *element of representation* is now posited as sublated; or it has returned into the self, into its concept. What in that element is only a being has now become subject. Just on that account the *first element, pure thinking* and the eternal spirit within it is no longer beyond the representing consciousness or the self, but the return of the whole into itself is just this: to contain all the moments within itself. When the death of the mediator is appropriated by the self, its *objectivity* – its *particular being on its own account* – is sublated. This *particular being on its own account* has become universal self-consciousness. On the

other side, the *universal* has thereby become self-consciousness and the pure or un-actual spirit of mere thinking has become *actual*. The death of the mediator is the death, not only of his *natural side*, or of his particular being on its own account – what dies is not just the already-dead husk shucked off by the essence, but also the *abstraction* of the divine essence. For, to the extent that his death has not accomplished the reconciliation, the mediator is what is one-sided, in knowing the singularity of thinking as the *essence* in contrast to actuality. The [other, actual] extreme of the self does not yet have the same value as the essence. The self will achieve this only in the spirit. The death of this representation thus contains at the same time the death of the *abstraction of the divine essence* that has not been posited as self. It is the agonizing feeling of the unhappy consciousness that *God himself has died*. This hard saying is the expression of the most inward simple knowing of oneself, the return of consciousness into the depth of the night where I simply equals I, distinguishing nothing from itself any longer, and so knowing nothing outside of itself. This feeling is thus, in fact, the loss of *substance* – of its place as situated over against consciousness. But at the same time it is the pure *subjectivity* of substance, or the pure certainty of itself, which it lacked when it was an object, or the immediate, pure essence. This knowing thus involves becoming spiritual, in which – its abstraction and lifelessness having died – substance has become subject, and hence *actual*, simple and universal self-consciousness.

In deciphering what is going on in this passage of dense Hegelian prose, the first task is to notice that Hegel has been distinguishing between two “elements” that together make up the content of self-consciousness at this stage. The first element is “pure thinking and the eternal spirit within it.” The second is the element of representation (“the absolute spirit represents the nature of spirit in its being as *a singular* or rather as something *particular*”), which includes the death of the mediator. Within consciousness at this stage, the second element has been sublated, that is “it has returned into the self, into its concept.” The two key terms in these passages – “thinking” and “representing” – are acts of intelligence – ways we employ our minds. In pure thought meaning connects simply to other meanings. In representation an idea (in the sense adopted by Locke and Hume) is tied to a picture or image that has its own spatio-temporal context; since each representation functions independently, there is no inherent rational connection that determines how they are to be related to each other, and so they are contingent, subject to the laws of association.

I suspect, however, that in using these terms Hegel wants to include more than just the subjective functions of the believing self-consciousness. Thinking is inherently rational. So pure thought is supposed to capture the rationality that is inherent in the universe – the ultimate reason why everything functions as it does. The fact that we humans are in the midst of a voyage to discover that rationality suggests that the reference is objective as well as subjective.

Similarly representation can have an objective sense. The German term could be read as “placing before”: intelligence “places” its conceptions “before” itself as independent ciphers. So one can read the second element not only as the way *we* “place” the divine essence “before ourselves” as a particular existence, but the first sentence can also be read as referring to the way the divine essence “places” the ultimate nature of spirit “before” us in a concrete, contingent being.⁷ Indeed, in the previous paragraph, Hegel has written about the “grasping of that *representation*, which through the *event* of the very self-emptying of the divine essence by means of its becoming man as an event and its death, has become reconciled with its being.” In these events, the divine essence is placing itself before our consciousness. What Hegel calls “the mediator” is thus something that *represents* pure rationality within the sphere of existence. In other words the two “elements” are not just ways we consider the world, but are dynamic features inherent in the universe presented to us.

By the end of the paragraph these two sides – the subjective moment of thinking and representing and the objective moment of the rational ground of the universe – are brought together and integrated in *actual* spirit. The question we need to focus on, then, is how, for Hegel, the element of contingent representation can lead us forward to the element of comprehensive actuality. There are, it seems to me, five steps on this path.

First, we are reminded that, with the death of the mediator, it has ceased to be an object of consciousness – it no longer has a particular being on its own account. Nonetheless it is supposed to function for us as a universal kind of self-consciousness – as something available to all of us, not just to those who happened to be present when it existed in time and space. (“When the death of the mediator is appropriated by the self, its *objectivity* – its *particular being on its own account* – is sublated. This *particular* being on its own account has become universal self-consciousness.”) The next sentence points out that this disappearance of the singular mediator has its implications for pure rationality, or the first element. After all, it is through the represented mediator that the pure essence as simply rational principle was supposed to overcome its lack of actuality. Through this contingent being “the pure or un-actual

spirit of mere thinking has become *actual*." At this stage in the analysis, however, this actualization of the divine essence is simply something reported to the believing self by the tradition. In Christian terms, it is belief in resurrection as the promise of pentecost.

The second step works out the implications of this story. The death of the mediator does not simply free its divine soul from the husk of its body – it is not simply the dissolution of its particularity into an amorphous generality. For the mediator itself knows the divine essence to be set over against the realm of actuality as its contrary. In the despairing cry "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark, 15:34) the mediator discovers how unactual the element of pure thinking on its own really is. ("The death of the mediator is the death, not only of his *natural side*, or of his particular being on its own account – what dies is not just the already-dead husk shucked off by the essence, but also the *abstraction* of the divine essence.") In other words, the fact that the "eternal" divine essence cannot prevent the second element (or its representation in actuality) from contingently passing away into death shows that it itself is simply an isolated abstraction that has on its own no distinct efficacy.

Third, the impotence of the divine essence shows that the self, which as one extreme is to be reconciled through the death of the mediator with that essence as the other extreme,⁸ has not really achieved its goal. Being embedded in actuality, the self is not "of equal value with the essence," now shown to be a mere abstraction, and is worthless. Nor has the death of the mediator brought that essence any closer. For it has only revealed how broad and nasty is the abyss that separates self from essence.

Thus we come to the critical fourth step. For the self has now lost any sense it had that the universe is inherently rational. The abstraction of the divine essence itself – what is to give meaning to the universe – has died. And this does not mean liberation from an oppressive overlord (as some might think), but something far more radical. The universe has lost any sense at all. There is no essential meaning out there that one can appeal to. And one is thrown back on the self simply as self⁹ – a dark night in which one can distinguish nothing significant and one has lost any hope of finding something to build upon. "The whole foundation on which life was constructed falls down." (Mill) It is a "descent into dark regions where nothing is revealed as fixed, definite and certain." (Hegel) "It is the agonizing feeling of the unhappy consciousness that *God himself has died*."¹⁰

Fifth, like one of those photographic negatives, which under a certain light is seen as a positive, this feeling of abandonment, without losing anything of its dynamic, is transformed. For the loss of the eternal essence

that was to embody the unchanging substance of the universe opens up a ceaseless flux, which has no fixed point of reference. Living within this flux, however, allows the full dynamic of subjectivity to emerge – not as something alien to ultimate reality, but as itself embodied in the movement from absolute essence through the contingent death of a mediating representation to the universal presence. The experience of the death of God turns out to be the experience of the ultimate reality that genuinely incorporates the universe – no longer as some kind of essential substance but as the dynamic flux of spirit within which we all live. Dwelling with the dark night nurtures a pure self-certainty which no kind of appeal to the object of consciousness, to immediate truth, or even to the essence “out there” that underlies reality can provide.

This is a self-certainty which also is spirit, a self-consciousness which has discovered in its dynamic simplicity and flux the inherent truth of all things. For in this experience the contingent mediating representations that are the embodiment of the divine essence cease to be, and with their death that abstract essence itself dissolves. Its secure stability evaporates into pure process – that process which comprehends everything, and is thus universal. This perpetual flux IS the ultimate meaning of all things. (“But at the same time it is the pure *subjectivity* of substance, or the pure certainty of itself, which it lacked when it was an object, or the immediate, pure essence. This knowing is thus the becoming spiritual, in which – its abstraction and lifelessness having died – substance has become subject, and hence *actual*, simple and universal self-consciousness.”)¹¹

Despair and depression, then, come about because the particular things we have relied on to make sense of the world – the “mediators” between ultimate reality and ourselves – dissolve and die – passing away into nothing. They show themselves to be, not necessary, but contingent. And that contingency removes any reliable, stable and substantial foundation. It is when we become fully aware of this that we are overwhelmed with despair: “God himself has died.” We must finally abandon any reliance on eternal truths.

Yet it is precisely this dissolution of all stability that heralds the possibility of absolute knowing. This goal of all epistemology can no longer be a confident claim to certain conclusions, nor a comprehension of everything in its essence. It can only be a flux, pure subjectivity, aware of the past that has brought it to the present, accepting the present as the dynamic life it can only enjoy, but leaving open the future. Though the next stages will emerge from the present, there are no essentials that will have to be maintained. Any aspect may be put in question. Contingencies will surprise us.

II

We now turn to our questions. First, why is this experience of the death of God triggered by the contingent death of a mediator? It is a question not easy to answer. For Hegel's prose is nowhere so exasperating in its cryptic density than here. So any proposal is tentative.

The first element of pure thinking, or God, is that foundation to which one turns for an ultimate explanation of the universe. Hegel's term 'absolute essence' is significant. It suggests that the term 'God' is not in the first instance the name of an individual. Rather it points to that reality which ultimately underlies and explains everything that is. For the atheist John Stuart Mill, it might be the altruistic hedonism implicit in Bentham's utilitarianism. For the believer, it is the conviction that the universe has an inherent tendency that moves toward an ultimate consummation. In other words it names whatever becomes the North Star for an individual's existence – the Truth around which everything else is ordered.

From this perspective, the mediator is any actual, historical existence that "mediates" this absolute essence by showing that it is not simply an abstract theory but actually works its influence in space and time. What is ultimate is not something ethereal but actual, present in history. By bridging the gap between the here and the beyond, the mediator offers evidence that the absolute is an absolute for THIS world.

Whenever we use the language of essence we are distinguishing essence from existence. What exists is not transparently *what it is to be*. One has to decipher the given to determine its significance; one has to probe behind the appearance to get at reality. And the role of the mediator is to show in existence what that ultimate is really like: how it might be attainable by those of us caught in the ambiguities of daily life.

Embedded in actuality, however, this mediator is bedeviled with transience and contingency. Nowhere does this become more explicit than at the point where it itself becomes prey to the contingencies of fate and dies. This particular actual, which is to reveal the underlying ground of everything that is, cannot resist the secondness of brute fact, but ceases to be.

What happens, then, when self-consciousness comes to terms with the death of the mediator? It realizes with a shock that the here and now of the absolute essence is no longer. For all that it was a genuine incarnation, contingencies have destroyed it. When examined with ruthless honesty, it turns out to be fatally flawed and incomplete. The hoped-for reconciliation has disappeared into that alien existence within which we all live. The absolute has dissolved into nothingness; it has been shown to

be a bare ineffectual abstraction. "Suppose all your objects in life were realized, would that be a great joy and happiness to you?" asks Mill for whom one is to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number. And the answer is "No!" In other words the mediator that is to bridge the gap, in dying, brings to an end not only its own finite existence but also any confidence we have that the ultimate end of life can be achieved in this world. For we are part of that finitude that marked its demise. That absolute essence upon which the self has relied and upon which it has built its existence is not able to resist the contingencies of fate.

This is how the death of the mediator brings with it – when fully grasped – the death of the abstraction of the divine essence: the death of the absolutely reliable, transcendent standard that made life worth living, the death of everything the self has stood for and everything that has defined the meaning of existence.

III

So much for the first question concerning the role of the mediator in triggering the experience of the death of God. Now let us turn to the second: what is the nature of the spiritual transformation that leads from night to day – from the dark night of the soul to the unitive life of self-knowing spirit?

It is a motif that recurs frequently in Hegel's writing. Consider the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, where he discusses the activity of dissolution or death that is the power and the work of the understanding. "Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast what is dead requires the greatest strength." Yet he goes on to say "it is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself pure from devastation, but rather that which bears it and maintains itself in it, that is the life of spirit."¹² Spirit looks the negative in the face, tarries with it, and thereby converts it, through its magical powers, into being.

Similarly, when Hegel wants to execute the transition from nature to spirit, organic nature reaches its culmination in death – the contingent death of contingent individuals. But the death of the individual constitutes at the same time the affirmation that spirit, as universal, is more than its individuality. The term "spirit" names the being that maintains its universality through the death of its immediate reality.¹³ "Spirit can bear the negation of its individual immediacy – infinite agony; that is, it can maintain itself affirmatively in this negativity and be identical on its own account."¹⁴

This, suggests Hegel, is the basis of spirit's freedom. For spirit "can abstract itself from everything external as well as its own externality." It can look into the abyss of nothingness in the moment of radical freedom and act spontaneously in a way not restricted to its conditions and circumstances, in a way that offers no protection or security.

But this also is the basis of spirit's universality. Its life is not dependent on any given set of circumstances or conditions. When contingencies force it to abandon one immediate point of reference it develops a dynamic that is more inclusive. When that new discovery in turn becomes fixed and habitual, it too will be shattered by new contingent events. This ongoing dynamic, says Hegel, "is the abstract, self-contained universality of spirit within itself."¹⁵

The essence of spirit, then, is to bear the contingent loss of immediacy and thereby discover itself. The religious experience of the dark night of the soul, where the absolute essence itself dies, is only the most profound and all-embracing of the forms that essence takes.

Throughout the *Phenomenology* it is those who have most honestly faced up to death – the death of immediacy – who trigger the magical transformation into a new affirmation. The slave, "as not in peril and fear for this element or that, nor for this or that time, ... was afraid for its entire being. It felt the fear of death, the sovereign master. In that experience it has been melted to its inmost soul, has trembled throughout its every fibre, and all that was fixed and steadfast has quaked within." Yet "this complete perturbation of its entire substance, this absolute dissolution of all its stability into fluid continuity is the simple, ultimate nature of self-consciousness, absolute negativity, pure self-referent existence."¹⁶ In other words, the dependent servant could not be transmuted into the genuinely independent self-consciousness if, in the struggle to the death, he had not faced up to the contingent reality of death, and in absolute fear and anguish had abandoned himself as substance to become simply the dynamic extension of the master's will.

Similarly it is the absolute self-mortification of unhappy consciousness that serves as a necessary condition for reason. By working to abandon everything that is changing within its own make-up, and seeking to identify itself with its unchanging object, it transcends its individuality, thus setting the stage for finding knowledge in the categories that subject and object share.

Again, when pleasure takes hold of life to possess it, we discover that we have abandoned ourselves to the lifeless necessity of fate. The self-centeredness of our individual quest for happiness (which, the aesthete says, is the category that explains all reality) finds that its singularity is

ground to dust through the necessity that governs the totality of the world. The singular pleasures lead into unavoidable consequences that destroy all gratification. What the hedonist thought was "taking life" in the sense of Horace's *carpe diem*, leads to "taking life" in a contrary sense: laying hold of death through suicide.¹⁷ It is the experience of this dark night that triggers the move to the law of the heart.

In the chapter on Spirit, Antigone, prepared to be faithful to death in her defense of the divine law, brings down the Greek city state in ruins, thereby opening the way for a more universal culture; while the counselor who is not prepared to go so far succumbs to offering flattery rather than truth and converts good into evil. Most significantly, when the enlightenment commitment to usefulness culminates in a reign of terror where everyone who attempts to do something useful is condemned to death, it sets the stage for the morality of self-conscious willing.¹⁸

A similar transition appears to have occurred with Mill. Moved to tears by a passage from Marmontel's "Mémoires" recounting how, having lost his father, the young author was inspired to "supply the place of all that was lost," Mill "gradually found that the ordinary incidents of life could again give me some pleasure; that I could again find enjoyment, not intense, but sufficient for cheerfulness, in sunshine and sky, in books, in conversation, in public affairs; and that there was, once more, excitement, though of a moderate kind, in exerting myself for my opinions and the public good."¹⁹

Spirit is the magical transformation by which the infinite agony of death is transmuted into life at a higher level. In other words, the experience of the death of God and the resulting discovery of universality is what distinguishes spirit from animal life and innocent existence.

It would seem, then, that this process of being educated through the loss of meaning is found in more than the one instance of justification by faith in Jesus's crucifixion. We can discern it in the writings of the slave Epictetus and the Greek poet Sophocles just as much as in Paul and Augustine. Indeed we have already discovered close analogies in Mill's *Autobiography* and in Hegel's letter of consolation to Windischmann, which makes no reference to explicitly Christian themes.

In fact one can go further. Despite what Hegel says about non-western religious traditions in his lectures, one finds the experience of abandoning the immediate supports of existence in the Buddhist eight-fold path that leads to the annihilation of desire and in the Muslim absolute submission to the will of Allah, in the Hindu karma which decrees that every individual must go through a thousand actual deaths before reaching fulfillment, or the native American vision of quest.

In other words, this dynamic is implicit in the life and experience of saints of many traditions – of people who have passed through the abandonment of all hope and discovered thereby a new quality of life. And the example of John Stuart Mill shows that it can find expression even in one who explicitly distances himself from all religion. In writing the *Autobiography* Mill was spelling out an important constituent of the wisdom of his later years, with the implicit assumption that it might be relevant to others.

What is significant about Christianity – and this is the reason why Hegel gives it pride of place – is that Christian doctrine explicitly provides in its representations the structure of this spiritual dynamic. Confident action leads to dissolution and despair – a despair that turns out to be the beginning of a new, richer life. Christianity says that this pattern is not just a characteristic of finite humans, but constitutive of the essence of the universe. The creation of a world that is good results in the fall, disobedience and evil; and eventually in the call of Abraham. The divine initiative in becoming man ends in the agony of the crucifixion which is converted into a new spiritual life, suggested in the resurrection and confirmed at Pentecost. The naive self-assurance of Peter and Paul, Augustine and Luther shatters into the awareness that the god that grounded their confidence has evaporated and died, leaving them bereft, exposed to their sinfulness and so open to a new birth out of death. This transformation, called justification and sanctification, is brought about by the contingent death of a mediator who is to enshrine the transformative essence of the universe and embody its presence in the human world. Because Christianity represents this dynamic pattern in its doctrine, says Hegel, it describes the lived experience of life in the spirit.

However, within this language of representation, the various moments are simply recounted as a story, happening in sequence, or assembled into a single picture. The dynamic of spirit is only implicit, not present in the doctrines that spell it out. It may be experienced by the one who lives through the experience of justification and sanctification, but not really understood. Only when that experience is set in context and, instructed by the experiences described in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, one sees how its pattern is found throughout human experience does one begin to realize how universal and how central to the life of spirit it is. On the other hand, only when a religion like Christianity, in its doctrines and representations, talks about this dynamic as constitutive of the ultimate essence of reality can one begin to recognize in the dark moments of human existence, not deviations from a uniformly happy life that need to be cured, but moments when we penetrate to the ultimate essence

of our humanity, transcending our limitations and experiencing a transformation into something more universal.²⁰

IV

Unlike animate and vegetative nature, suggests Hegel, spirit suffers "the negation of its individual immediacy – infinite, agonizing pain"²¹ and learns from it. By bearing death in this way it maintains itself affirmatively despite being overwhelmed by contingent negativity.

Spirit's agony of negativity results from the contingent loss of centeredness. The proven strategies of self-determination and self-constitution in face of our double-textured experience no longer work. Everything becomes flux as singularity is dissolved into spirit's generic universality. The simple structure of life, with its rhythm of sensibility, irritableness and reconstitution has been shattered.²² There is no unique center to respond, and so whatever was is no longer. The singular has passed away. This is why "death" is the appropriate term to describe it. But spirit can look the negative in the face, tarry with it, and thereby convert it into being. A finite spirit emerges as a new individual, of a more encompassing genus, able to range over a wider choice of possibilities, even though, as a centered individual, it continues to be open to dissolution and despair.

Pushed to its extreme, the flux involved in being open to everything while at the same time resisting everything leads to the destruction of the previous, centered, self-determining structure. Though this flux seems to herald chaos, it nonetheless has its own character, defined by the determinate process through which the old was dissolved. So the flux develops a dynamic pattern in its own right, a pattern that is now free to constitute itself as a new center, once the restraining structure of the old has been destroyed. There is a genuine metamorphosis.

This transformation does not simply happen. For it relies not only on the acceptance of the contingent events that brought spirit to the agonizing pain of negativity. It relies as well on the resistant, irritable moment of will. But it is will of a new sort: not the determined reaffirmation of a familiar standard, but the affirmation and willed acceptance of the new.

So this will cannot anticipate what is going to occur before it happens. Because all the familiar guidelines have been dissolved into a transient flux, there is no clear indication of how the new resolution will be defined. Each negation is determinate, not only in the sense that the integrating principle being negated helps to define what results, but also in the sense that any result must incorporate the specific, contingent way by which that original principle dissolved into nothingness.

Will, however, is ambiguous. In accepting and affirming the new, it fixes it as a new, centered structure, and that centered structure soon develops its own focus, defining and limiting the life of spirit. In time, this, too, is destined to dissolve into the agonized pain of negativity.

The general outline of this pain of negativity allows for a variety of instantiations. In one sense, it is captured in the various stages of the *Phenomenology*, when a confident claim to knowledge dissolves on being faced with its own internal contradiction. It can be found in any process of learning, where favorite convictions are shattered. But the most traumatic occurs when the all-encompassing principle that governs one's whole understanding of the universe turns out to be fallible and finite – when God's very self lies dead. That is the agonizing feeling of unhappy consciousness so well captured in John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*. If this agony of negativity is the very essence of spirit, it is not surprising if we as well either have shared or will share in the type of hypochondria described by Windischmann and Hegel. Even in the midst of despair, however, we may hope that out of the chaos will emerge the passport by which we can emigrate from substance to subject – to actual, simple and universal self-consciousness.

5

Absolute Knowing

In his study of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, *In the Spirit of Hegel*, Robert C. Solomon defines absolute knowledge as "knowledge that is unbiased, undistorted, unqualified, all-encompassing, free from counter-examples and internal inconsistencies. Opposed to: relative, qualified, conditioned, abstract, partial It means having an adequate *conception* of knowledge and the Absolute, and understanding that there is no separation or 'epistemological gap' between them."¹ Solomon is suggesting that Absolute Knowing – the stage reached at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – involves knowing unambiguously an entity called the Absolute, which is the "unified, comprehensible whole" of reality.

Support for this claim can be found in the pages of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*. For in §85 Hegel says that the various logical concepts – or at least the first and third in any triad – "may be looked upon as definitions of the Absolute."² With this in mind, Merold Westphal seems justified in concluding that "what has emerged in Absolute Knowledge is not just a new theory of knowledge, but a whole new view of reality, a new ontology."³ In other words, it is claimed that absolute knowing involves insight into the central core of everything that is.

Inspired perhaps by F.H. Bradley, whose *Appearance and Reality* concludes with the chapter: "The Absolute and its Appearances," a number of interpreters have concluded that the Absolute (which has been identified with absolute spirit) is central to Hegel's system. E.E. Harris takes this approach much further: "The Absolute, for Hegel, is a transcendent whole without being a separate or separable (and so just another finite) reality. It is at once immanent and transcendent. It is at once identical with, yet also different from, its Other, which is the world." And again: "The dialectic is the way in which the whole differentiates itself; and this could be anticipated only with a full and adequate grasp of the Absolute,

which is never available at any preliminary stage of its history.”⁴ On this reading, then, we are led to believe that there is something called “the Absolute,” which is fully comprehended, at least in principle, once we come to absolute knowledge.

But when we turn to the texts that Hegel himself wrote and published during his lifetime, we find that the term “absolute” is used as a noun in strictly limited situations which fall under three heads: when Hegel is writing in a Schellingian context, in his discussions of religion and when he is referring to Spinoza’s substance.

It was a colleague from seminary, Schelling, who exploited the term “absolute” as a noun. He set the idealism of Kant and Fichte – where transcendental consciousness is the foundation of all knowing – over against the philosophy of nature, which explores the inherent structures of the world we directly encounter through intuition. The two mutually complement each other; and the point of indifference or undifferentiation where the complements meet Schelling called the Absolute.⁵ When Hegel initiated his advanced studies at Jena it was as an associate of the already established Schelling. So all the Jena works, including the *Phenomenology*, were written at a time when Schelling was defining the context for philosophical discussion and Hegel was struggling to establish his reputation.

As a result it is Schelling’s concept of the Absolute that provides the reference for Hegel’s use of the term in the *Differenzschrift*,⁶ where he is comparing Fichte’s *Science of Knowledge* with Schelling’s point of indifference between consciousness and nature. In the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it is a version of the Schellingian Absolute that becomes the monotonous night in which all cows are black; and in its Introduction it is with reference to Schelling’s Absolute that Hegel caricatures the traditional attempts to get epistemology out of the way before talking about metaphysics.⁷

When we turn to the critical §85 of the Berlin *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel has carefully modified the text of the 1817 Heidelberg version. Originally he had written: “The valid first definition of the Absolute is thus: it is pure being.” By 1830 he is more cautious: “Being, as well as the following determinations not only of being, but the logical determinations in general *can be seen as* definitions of the Absolute, as the metaphysical definitions of God.”⁸ The deliberate shift in emphasis from simple affirmative predication to “can be seen as” suggests that Hegel is starting to move away from the Schellingian vocabulary of his Jena years.

The passage from the *Encyclopaedia* illustrates the close relationship between the Schellingian contexts for “the Absolute” and the use of the

term when Hegel is talking about religion. A definition of the absolute is equated to traditional definitions of God. In other words, when Hegel wants to explore the conceptual content of religious faith without drawing on the personalistic associations of the representation "God," he will adopt the term "the Absolute," or more often "the absolute essence/being" (*das absolute Wesen*). This vocabulary occurs throughout the *Phenomenology* in the discussions of faith and the enlightenment, of conscience and of religion.⁹ Indeed, we encountered it in the previous chapter as the abstract essence that dies to produce the infinite agony of the dark night of the soul. Once again this term is not used for the particular object of Hegel's own philosophy; rather it represents the role God plays in the religious consciousness before the agonizing experience of God's death. God is what is absolutely essential about the world.

The third setting for Hegel's use of "absolute" as a noun is in his discussions of Spinoza. Towards the end of the chapter on Absolute Knowing in the *Phenomenology*, he introduces a reference to Spinoza's substance: "Substance would serve as the Absolute only to the extent that it were thought or intuited as *absolute unity*, and all content in its diversity would have to fall outside it in [a kind of] reflection that does not belong to it." Were any such content to be spoken of, it would either be thrown into the "empty abyss of the absolute" or else hastily assembled from sensory perception.¹⁰

Later, in the introduction to the third book of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel allows that substance is the absolute. But he adds that the philosophy which situates itself in the standpoint of substance and stays there is the system of Spinoza, which he has already explored earlier, in the second book; and he notes that Spinoza's system does not represent the highest standpoint.¹¹ So while Hegel does include a chapter entitled "The Absolute," it is far from being the culmination of his logical system, but rather the initial exploration of actuality within the book on Essence, and leads on to discussions of possibility, necessity, substance, cause and reciprocity before venturing into the final book of the *Logic*, titled "Conceiving."

In none of these cases, then, is there any evidence that Hegel wants to appropriate the noun "absolute" to capture the ultimate focus of his own philosophy.¹²

If the noun "absolute" is restricted to limited and specific contexts, the adjective is pervasive. Each of the main independent works Hegel published ends with a chapter that contains it in the title: "Absolute Knowing" for the *Phenomenology*; "Absolute Idea" for the *Logic*; and "Absolute Spirit" for the *Encyclopaedia*. So we are left with a question: if in

these contexts Hegel is not referring to some entity called “the Absolute”, what does he mean to say when using the adjective?

To find the background for the use of “absolute” as an adjective one turns not to Schelling but to Kant. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant bemoans the fact that “absolute” as an adjective “is now often used merely to indicate that something is true of a thing considered *in itself* [*an sich selbst*] and therefore in its *inward* nature [*innerlich*]. In this sense the absolutely possible would mean that which in itself is possible – which is, in fact, the least that can be said of an object.”¹³

Kant prefers an alternate meaning: “The word is sometimes used to indicate that something is valid in all respects, without limitation. ... In this sense the absolutely possible would mean what is possible in every relation – which is the most that can be said of the possibility of a thing. It is in this wider sense,” he goes on to say, “that I shall use the word ‘absolute,’ opposing it to what is valid only comparatively, that is, in some particular respect.”¹⁴

Adopting Kant’s definition, then, the final chapters of Hegel’s books would talk about a knowing that is effective without limitation; an idea that is valid in all respects; spirit that permeates every relation. And these are contrasted with a partial knowing, an idea restricted by conditions, a finite and limited spirit. “Absolute” as an adjective is the opposite of “relative.”¹⁵ The nouns “knowing” and “idea” refer to intellectual activities rather than some identifiable entity; “spirit,” as Hegel carefully explains in the *Phenomenology*, is the play of forces that develops where a number of players mutually recognize each other.¹⁶ So even absolute spirit is not a singular entity but a dynamic interplay, as many agents reciprocally interact.

In the course of this study, we shall have to examine closely all three of these “absolutes.” After all, the term does suggest that all contingency is overwhelmed in an all-encompassing and unlimited totality. So, to establish our thesis, it will be necessary to show that in each of these final chapters contingency is absolutely necessary, not as something to be overcome and transcended in the end, but as an essential, and continuing ingredient.

For the present, however, we shall focus on just the first one: Hegel’s discussion of absolute knowing in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Picking up from what we have learned from Kant, I shall argue that, when Hegel explores what it means to know absolutely, he is not implying that we are going to know something called “the Absolute.” He is suggesting instead that there is a kind of knowing that can be exercised universally. So, what does it mean to know in a way that is valid without restriction, such that certainty and truth fully coincide, if contingency plays a central and critical role?

As we have already seen, at each stage of the *Phenomenology*, consciousness, self-consciousness, reason or spirit is initially convinced that it knows absolutely – that sense certainty, or scepticism, or rational observation, or enlightened conviction is valid in all respects. One starts, for example, from the assumption that only in direct sensing's certainty is truth captured; when that conviction lies shattered in the dust as a result of an encounter with secondness, one moves on to the equally unconditional assumption that perception is the pathway to knowledge. And the sequence continues through the conviction that first the master knows without restriction, then the slave; that rational observation, then the pursuit of pleasure, then faith or the enlightenment, then conscience, then various religious perspectives know absolutely one after another. Absolute knowing, it turns out, is not the prerogative of Hegel. It is, rather, central to all confident knowledge claims, whenever and wherever they occur. And all of them turn out to be relative. They dialectically convert into their opposites.

That being the case, what can be so different about the position described in Hegel's final chapter? How can it escape the destiny that overtakes all the earlier presumptions? Why does it not also collapse into despair?

To answer that question let us turn to what is actually said in that final chapter. People frequently complain that it is too condensed. But it is short because it simply reviews all the various stages that have gone before. The common pattern has been identified in the first three chapters: sense certainty takes immediate being as its object; perception recognizes that there is a relation of otherness between the object on its own account and the knowing consciousness; finally understanding explores what is essential or universal in the whole structure. This pattern shows that knowing is not simply grasping some object, but a whole process of becoming – a process that moves from a first, immediate appropriation, through a diversity of various forms of knowing, to a stage where the picture is considered as a whole and its essential moments identified.¹⁷

Hegel then applies this pattern to the middle section of the *Phenomenology*. On the one hand, observing reason wants simply to observe the object as an indifferent being. The result is that even the "I" becomes just a thing: the quest for knowledge through simple observation tries to identify the characteristics of the "I" by observing facial characteristics and the bumps on the skull. The failure of this attempt triggers another search for knowledge through the functions of the self and its relation to the world. This dynamic interrelationship between opposites reaches its culmination in the enlightenment, where everything (even

every other self) is considered as simply useful for the self: utility defines the value of everything. If the first perspective is captured in the statement: "The I is a thing;" the second can be expressed by its opposite: "The thing is I."¹⁸

These two contrary moments do not complete the picture. We must move beyond the immediacy of being, and a relation of otherness to the essential inner core. And that, says Hegel, is found in moral self-consciousness. The essence is found in pure willing and knowing. (Curiously Hegel identifies the two.) In willing, the self creates an objective world which is then to be reappropriated as the embodiment of its own self. The purest form of this is found in the insights of conscience, which does not appeal to any abstract universal, but simply to the intuition of its own duty.¹⁹

What is critical about these final stages is the moment of action. Willing, as we have seen, is there identified with knowing. Indeed it is through action that the immediate conviction becomes realized in an alien world, creating a relation of otherness, which only then can be reappropriated and reintegrated into the self's self-knowledge.

There is a problem, however. For the actuality that emerges from action has its own iron independence from the self. The only thing we can do is offer excuses for the fact that things did not turn out as we intended. Any ultimate reconciliation occurs only when the self recognizes and acknowledges its own responsibility for the failure, and when the reality that has emerged shows that it is itself pliable and amenable to further manipulation.²⁰

Hegel says that this reconciliation of our consciousness of the objective world with our own self-consciousness is achieved in two different forms. On the one hand, the religious spirit, at the moment where it has passed through the dark night of the soul, realizes that the ultimate reality of the world is to be found in contingent moments where we lose ourselves completely because any abstract transcendental deity has also disappeared into the dynamic of pure process, a process we have already investigated in the previous chapter. This, says Hegel, is the desired reconciliation in itself. But it is not yet something that we realize on its own account.

On the other hand, pure conscience becomes the beautiful soul. Reputedly the beautiful soul is self-contained, withdrawn into her own convictions, supposedly the precious self of Novalis. But this soul cannot remain centered on herself. She must act out her convictions. In her self-certainty, the beautiful soul incorporates the experiences of the individual and of the culture traced throughout the *Phenomenology* to this point.

She has learned from her experience; and her conviction is thus a positive achievement. She has distilled into her immediate insight the accumulated wisdom of the ages.²¹

At the same time, because willing and knowing are intimately connected, the beautiful soul has to act on her conviction; through action she tests the truth of what she has learned.²² When she puts her insight into practice, she discovers that her action is condemned – not on the basis of any alien standard, but by the very ideals that she had intended to actualize. For once the action becomes something in the real world, it turns out to produce the opposite of what the beautiful soul had willed. She had intended something universal; she produced something particular. She had intended something unambiguous; she produced something equivocal and contingent. The intention which was so good, because it was based on the accumulated wisdom of experience, has turned into an actual action which is evil because it hypocritically distorts the good.²³

The condemnation is severe; and the beautiful soul finds herself before a harsh, judging consciousness.²⁴ Since the standard used derives from the accumulation of all past experience, it is supposed to be an absolute standard that has taken account of all previous limitations and holds without restriction. So, once aware of the discrepancy between intention and act, the beautiful soul confesses that, despite her willing to do the good, she has done evil. Initially the judge only becomes the more severe, keeping himself pure and untainted by action. Pushed to the extreme, however, he realizes that this judgement is itself an action, one that, in its concrete particularity betrays his own good intention to apply just those universal principles of justice that he espouses. Once both sides admit their fallibility, and incorporate it into their self-knowledge, the two become reconciled. This reconciliation, this dynamic of mutual recognition, is absolute spirit.²⁵

This is the story told in the chapter on the beautiful soul. In this dynamic story, Hegel says, we find reconciliation on its own account, contained within the experience of conscious willing and knowing. The only thing left is to try to unite into a single story, the story told by revealed religion in its various representative forms, and the story experienced by the beautiful soul. This involves finding a form of knowing which captures not only the truths learned by the beautiful soul but also in principle all the truths discovered over the course of human history. At the same time we must recognize that this truth articulates the inherent dynamic which integrates into a single perspective the various doctrines used by religion to represent the ultimate essence of the world – “the absolute *content as content*.”²⁶

This is achieved in a final form of spirit's appearance: that of the "*acting, self-certain spirit*." Hegel himself stresses the participle in that phrase, and he does so twice, for he is focusing on his earlier identification of willing with knowing. The content of absolute knowing, implicit in religion, acquires its appropriate form in the self who is not just self-certain, but also an agent – who "*surrenders its eternal essence, is there, or acts*."

I have already argued that Hegel's thinking is rather like that of the "pragmatist," C.S. Peirce.²⁷ Both philosophers studied Kant's two *Critiques* closely, and both concluded that knowing and acting cannot be isolated into separate, independent realms (as Kant would have it) but are rather two sides of a single complex process. "The whole function of thought is to produce habits of action," wrote Peirce in "How to Make Our Ideas Clear." "There is no distinction of meaning so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference in practice." He expressed this most succinctly in the pragmatic principle: "Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object."²⁸ Pure and practical reason are not radically distinct, as Kant had assumed. One acts on one's theoretical beliefs. And through one's actions one tests the truth of what one has learned.

This integration of theory and practice is a continuing theme throughout Hegel's philosophy. In the *Phenomenology*, consciousness' certain conviction at each stage is put to the test when it actually tries to know something in the way it advocates. Sense certainty looks from a sunlit house to a tree in moonlight. Creon does not just espouse the laws of the state; he enforces them by executing Antigone for burying her brother. The French Revolution becomes the reign of terror because it puts the ideals of the Enlightenment into practice. Throughout, practice controverts theory.

This core pattern, inherent in the whole history of our experiences, is spelled out by Hegel in this critical paragraph of his final chapter. Action involves first of all the confidence that one sees things correctly. But it moves out from this self-certainty into a doubling, where the initial concept faces the way it has been actualized in an existing world. The realm of actuality has a life of its own and thus becomes quite distinct from the original intention. To this extent it is not good, but bad. Once we become aware of this discrepancy, we retreat into an appeal to our pure intention, isolated from any action and from any actuality – the essence of our original will. Through this move we become aware of the opposition between our intention, which remains pure and good, and the actual results which have developed an existence on their own

account and which we can only call evil. In other words, when consciousness reflects on its actions and their results, it takes full account of the conflict and opposition between the two.

At the same time, it has to acknowledge that it was its own action that produced the evil result. The alien and evil other is not radically independent of its own purity but rather what emerged when it was put into practice. In a sense it repeats the act of renunciation of separated purity involved in the initial action, but now it does so, aware of the results that eventually emerged. So we have a complex relationship between the two sides. On the one hand we have the dissimilarity between the self-contained resulting actuality as singular and the universal from which it emerged; on the other hand we have the dissimilarity between the abstract universality of intention and the actual singular self that, as agent, acts. The actual evil loses its independence, renounces itself and admits its failings; the pure intention disavows the hardness of its abstract universality, and thus loses its immovable universality and lifeless identity. Each is thus enriched by the other.

It is through this integration of knowing and willing that spirit fully comes on the scene. All residual appeals to substance and security disappear; and spirit becomes fully transparent to itself. The life that found expression throughout the experience of the ages is now fully articulated in thought: conviction and action continually emerge into an absolute opposition; and then out of this alienation – and by means of it – spirit returns into itself. In this reciprocal interaction between thought and will, spirit achieves the pure universality of knowing that is self-consciousness.²⁹

This dynamic structure of fully self-conscious action encapsulates both moments of the previous discussion. On the one hand, it integrates into a single, but complex, conception the story told in the representations of revealed religion: of a pure and absolute essence that acts to create a world only to discover that the world has an evil life of its own; and that then renounces its purity to become involved in that world, triggering in response the abandoning of independence on the part of the evil creatures, and thus setting the stage for a “life in the spirit” where each accepts its responsibility for the other. We can now understand conceptually why religion represents the cosmos in this way.

But on the other hand, we have captured the essential core of the whole pattern of human experience, from the immediacy of sense certainty through to the precious confidence of the beautiful soul. Critical to all that history is not the content that was to be known, but the process which moves from the pure intention to know, to the actual content that results

from putting it into practice. The discrepancy initially triggers efforts to retain the purity by trying other approaches. Only when it is acknowledged that the initial pure intention and the alien evil result are not independent, but mutually condition each other, are we able to construct a more adequate kind of knowledge claim. In other words, this learning process is the way we have come to know in every circumstance; it is valid in all respects and without limitation.

There are two things to notice about this conclusion. First, in this final claim to knowing absolutely, the focus is not on the content known. Certainly the content of all past experience has had to be acknowledged and incorporated into both the original intention and the resulting evil. But what makes the knowledge absolute is not that the content exhaustively captures everything that is, even in principle. Rather, it is the dynamic process involved in acting – in putting conviction into practice: the move from pure conceptual intention through the contingent existence produced to the recognition, not only of the radical discrepancy between intention and evil, but also of the way they mutually reflect and condition each other. That is the way we know absolutely.

But the second implication is even more important for our theme. For it means that we can never capture reality as a “unified, comprehensible whole” within our knowledge. Any new reconciliation becomes in its turn a new kind of self-certainty that acts to put theory into practice, and discovers contingencies that disrupt the intention. That moment of the contingent result becoming evil, in that it is the unexpected opposite of the good intended, is central to all genuine knowledge. Contingency is the systematic condition for the development of the only kind of absolute knowing that will not in its turn become relative.

In taking account of this conclusion we discover significant differences between Peirce and Hegel – differences that have a bearing on the role of contingency. For Peirce, the meaning of a thought is the way it turns out in practice, and what is true is what everyone who investigates will ultimately agree on.³⁰ For Hegel, on the other hand, putting thought into action to realize its meaning will *inevitably* produce something alien to the original thought – “that which is evil.” [*das Bösesein*] Instead of welcoming a successful confirmation, the agent challenges the practical result because it conflicts with the ideal, and retreats into the “non-acting, non-actual pure knowing of the essence,” in conscious opposition to the contingencies that have emerged in acting. Actions complicate intentions rather than confirm them.

This contrast leads to a second, more radical difference. For Hegel, the moment of reconciliation or forgiveness builds on the opposition that has

emerged between the “good” non-acting judge and the “evil” of the alien, contingent result. These moments are retained when each side surrenders its independence and acknowledges the way it has been the condition for what the other turned out to be. Absolute knowing must give each of two elements its due: the evil contingencies that result from genuinely free action, and the reconciliation which incorporates those contingencies into a more comprehensive resolution.

In Peirce, on the other hand, when unexpected experience confounds one's beliefs, there is no confident expectation of a promising outcome. The “abductive” solution is a guess, itself quite contingent. Though he admits that we are successful often enough that our thinking seems in harmony with nature, he does not see the necessity that lies hidden within the expanding complexity – how contingencies serve as the necessary condition for subsequent self-certain belief.

Failures for Peirce are contingencies that one yearns eventually to overcome; and true beliefs are those that will never be confounded in practice. Hegel, in contrast, says that contingencies are inevitable – necessary components in the dynamic process of any knowledge whatsoever. It is this sombre picture of always being surprised by new kinds of failure that removes Hegel from the ranks of the romantics, and enriches the concept of experience. Absolute knowing involves absolute uncertainty.

6

Language and Thought

If Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* explores our quest for knowledge, his *Science of Logic* investigates the nature of reason. Here, in a final chapter entitled "The Absolute Idea," he considers how and why rational thought is "valid in all respects."

This is not simply a question of our subjective, human way of thinking about the world. Certainly reasoning is involved when we form our concepts, combine them into propositions and then draw inferences. But we also use these resources to investigate the rationality of objects, independent of our subjective predispositions; this is the presupposition of all science, whether natural or social.

Science can be confident that our reasoning grasps the nature of the world outside us because we have learned from experience to correct our reasoning when it leads to wrong conclusions. That the experience of failure is presupposed by all disciplined knowledge is what Hegel's *Phenomenology* was designed to show. By taking full account of secondness, and by integrating into our conceptual "knowledge" the results that emerged when we put it into practice, we practice a kind of knowing that is valid in all respects.

In the *Logic* Hegel investigates the way rational thinking, for all that it is trained by our long experience of the world, develops when it focuses simply on itself – on nothing more than the implications of its own concepts. What is involved when we use concepts like "magnitude," or "measuring," or "difference," or "substance?" What is implied when we adopt predicates like "is," or "determines," or "appears," or "causes?" Such questions of meaning are asked and answered without requiring any reference to things and events in the world of space and time.

But this raises a further question: what is it that enables pure thought to work simply with its own resources and come up with reliable results?

After all, though both your thinking and mine is the result of experience, our experiences can be quite idiosyncratic to ourselves. My intellectual development involves infant years in Korea, many youthful Sundays listening to my father's sermons, inspiring lectures from Emil Fackenheim, years spent living in Germany, France, England and Italy. All of that is incorporated into the way my mind thinks. At the same time, you, as reader, can identify experiences that are peculiar to yourself, that have moulded your reflection and your judgment. How, then, can we talk about reason having a kind of inherent and objective necessity? If contingencies are necessary, then these contingent ways our minds have been formed will impinge on the way we think.

We do, however, have in common an important element of our intellectual development: our language.

"The forms of thought are first set out and laid down in human language," wrote Hegel. "In our days it cannot be recalled often enough that what distinguishes humans from animals is language. Language has penetrated into everything which, for us, becomes something internal as representations in general and which we thus make our own. Whatever we convert into speech and express thereby contains a category, either hidden, confused or fully articulated. So natural is the logical to humans; better, it is our peculiar nature."¹

Despite the fact that the logical categories may be implicit in language, Hegel admits that they may also be quite confused or hidden. For the development of language is bedevilled with contingency. Human passions, unexpected events, chance encounters all play their role in the terms we choose and the forms they take. Poets create metaphors and young people develop slang, a few of which gradually become the coinage of conventional discourse, taking up into common speech the contingent interests of a sub-culture or a transient fad. If language is to provide the starting point for the development of a common reason, then, there is a danger that this reasoning will be bedevilled by accidental and unimportant influences. And that would call in question any claim that reason can lead us to knowledge. For our appeals to "reason" would simply become a pretext for imposing our interests on our culture and our environment.

Is it possible for reason to rise above these contingencies of individual experience, and begin to articulate the universal and necessary principles of the world? How can our thinking, exercised within our distinctive age and our particular culture, hope to lead us toward certainty and

truth? After all, if contingencies are necessary, then universal reason would seem to be a chimera.

To see how Hegel answers this question we must dig deep into his philosophy, for he wrote long before the emergence of the "hermeneutic of suspicion," in which all confident conclusions are examined for idiosyncratic biases. "Postmodern" scepticism was not an intellectual position that he had to address directly, either in his prefaces, or when working out the logic of his system. So we must develop an answer from clues found here and there within his philosophy.

Since he has told us that the categories of logic with its necessary reasoning are found, hidden and confused, within our language, it is to his theory of oral and written signs that we should turn. How can he take the language we all use – and which influences our intellectual development – and relate it, in all its contingency, to the universality and necessity of pure reason?

Some remarks of Hegel (in the Introduction to the section of the "Doctrine of the Concept" on Objectivity) make clear that the logic does not simply adopt terms from everyday speech without question:

As we noted, there have already emerged several forms of immediacy, though under diverse determinations. In the sphere of being, it is "being" itself, or "*Dasein*," in the sphere of essence, "existence," and then "actuality" and "substantiality," in the sphere of concept as well, in addition to immediacy as "abstract universality," now "objectivity." These expressions may, if we do not concern ourselves with the exactitude of philosophical and conceptual distinctions, be used synonymously. These determinations have, however, emerged from conceptual necessity: "being" is in general the *first* immediacy, and "*Dasein*" the same but with a first determination. "Existence" along with the "thing" is immediacy that arises out of a ground – out of the self-cancelling mediation of simple reflection about essence. "Actuality," however, and "substantiality" is [sic] the immediacy which has arisen out of the cancelled or sublated distinction between the still inessential existence as appearance and its essentiality. Finally, "objectivity" is the immediacy to which the concept determines itself by sublating (or overcoming) its abstraction and mediation.

Now comes the critical comment:

Philosophy has the right to choose from the language of everyday life which is made for the world of representation those expressions

that *appear to come close* to the determinations of the concept. It can thus not be a question of proving, for a word chosen from the speech of everyday life, that within that shared life one unites it with the same concept for which philosophy uses it; for everyday life has no concepts, only representations; and it is given to philosophy itself to recognize the concept of that which otherwise is a mere representation. So it must suffice if, in those expressions which are used for philosophical discrimination, representation has a dim and approximate notion of their difference, as may be the case in the expressions we cited, so that one recognizes in the imperceptible transitions between representations what is more closely concerned with the corresponding concept. Even if these terms are used synonymously, [he concludes], philosophy has nonetheless the freedom to use such empty superabundance of language for its own distinctions.²

There is, then, an uneasy partnership between thought and language. On the one hand, despite its contingency, language not only contains thought implicitly, but it also defines humans as rational and logical. On the other hand, because of its contingency, ordinary speech pays little, if any, attention to the distinctions that careful conceptual thought is impelled to draw. In the following I propose to investigate this relationship as Hegel must have understood it. In the first place, I shall use Hegel's psychology to show how sounds can become signs for intellectual meanings, and what those meanings ultimately are like. Then I shall investigate Hegel's logical method, and in particular how he can arrive at immediate terms from an extensive sequence of conceptual mediations. Finally, I shall make some comments on how these two patterns both converge and diverge in the intellect.³

I

Hegel discusses the psychology of language within the section on representation, at the end of the sub-section on imagination. Language, he suggests, is the product of a facility he calls "sign-making fantasy." Once created, a sign presents itself to our intuition, but it does not function passively, simply drawing our attention to the immediate content of whatever we are actually seeing or hearing. Rather, by its means the imagination *refers* to something else, an independent representation.⁴

What, one may ask, is the "reference" thus signified? What is the sign a sign *of*? A sign provides a being,⁵ or immediate presence, that stands for

a content quite distinct from itself – a content that has been generated through its symbolizing, allegorizing or poetic imagination. In this latter kind of creative activity the intelligence has freely connected images and representations together, subsuming under some particular theme it has in mind the material that it assembled within the storehouse of its subconscious.⁶ Imagination functions synthetically, in other words, bringing together a variety of impressions or conceptions by virtue of something they share, whether obvious or created. It is this shared content that becomes the “reference” to be publicly presented and so intuited by means of a spoken sign.

The intelligence intuits its own functions in this way because, in fantasy, it has taken the initiative and is free, aware of its own agency. But this freedom has emerged from a prior activity that is hidden, taking place within the dark pit of the subconscious. For the conscious working of imagination only makes explicit the way intelligence subconsciously associates images and representations. In Hegel’s day, the laws of the association of ideas had been put forward by empirical psychologists⁷ who, following Hume, realized that one could discern some kind of regularity in the way representations follow one another within the stream of consciousness. The mind moves from thought to thought – or from idea to idea if we use the language of Locke, Hume (and Frege) – because of some resemblance or some contiguity in space or time. In this way the mind subconsciously either recognizes or produces universals – whatever the two associated images have in common. It is this work of reproductive imagination which first moves from individual images or representations to connections and associations that capture something common to several. And the fact that this happens subconsciously provides the foundation upon which fantasy can build when it freely symbolizes or allegorizes, indeed creatively imagines. In all these forms of imagination there is a synthetic move, and the synthesis captures something common to several representations, something that may in its turn become the meaning of a spoken or written sign.⁸

The work of imagination, however, is not original. For the images and representations which become its raw material have already been internalized into the subconscious storehouse of the intellect. Images and impressions that are the content of intuition have been ripped free from their original context, when they were first encountered in the spatio-temporal world of our experience. They thereby become mental entities, divorced from their original circumstances. As thus isolated, they survive the disappearance of those circumstances, and are retained by intelligence to become its material and content.

Since this retained content is no longer directly intuited, and has thus lost the bright light of immediate awareness, it has moved into a night-like pit, below the threshold of consciousness. It is in this storehouse that intelligence “retains a world of infinitely many pictures and representations.”⁹ Distinct from these retained pictures of intuitions, our representations only develop when a new intuited image recalls from this pit similar images and we then subsume this new particular under recalled representations that have the same content, a process we may call “recollection.” Here again we find a synthesis – of an image or impression with a recalled content – which can become the meaning of a sign.

Representations, then, are not to be simply identified with images, nor with what Hume called impressions. They are generalized, what Hume called ideas, giving some kind of status to the content that a number of impressions, whether recalled or immediate, share.¹⁰ As such they can become, together with newly encountered images and impressions, the counters that may be linked with more distant content through the work of imagination, whether simple association, fantasy, or indeed the production of signs itself.

Before drawing our conclusions from this analysis of recollection and imagination, we need to comment briefly on the initial activity of intuition. How is it that this faculty can divorce something immediately presented in the intellect by experience from its time, place and circumstances?¹¹

Intelligence, as theoretical spirit, has moved beyond the simple consciousness and self-consciousness of phenomenology. It has become certain that its own determinations are at the same time determinations of the essence of things.¹² As such it finds itself immediately determined and determinate, floating in a muffled presence that is initially simply felt – a “booming, buzzing confusion” (James) that it experiences as its environment. When intelligence turns its attention to this material, however, it appropriates that content for itself even as it leaves the immediacy of the impression behind in the space and time where it originally occurred. Intuition is the concrete unity of these two activities: the muffled presence and the discrimination of attention. By distinguishing the original space and time from its own appropriation, it makes the impression or image into something that can disappear into the pit of its subconscious, and thus set the stage for recollection and imagination.

We started on this long retreat into the stages of Hegel's psychology to answer the question: what is the “reference” for our linguistic signs? We can now offer a preliminary answer. The sign “refers” to something universal which has emerged from the syntheses of imagination. At the

most basic level this universal is a representation which links together a number of recollected images that have the same content. At a more sophisticated level it is that which connects associated ideas, whether that association be the quasi-instinctive activity of the subconscious or the deliberate product of fantasy. Through signs the intellect refers to those mental transitions that link individual representations and images within its own dynamic – within the synthetic activity of imagination.¹³ At the foundation of all such generalities and transitions lies the basic content that intuition noticed within its immediate experience.

II

So much for how words acquire their “reference.” Our next question is how such words can become the instruments of systematic thought. Hegel takes up this challenge in the subsequent sections of his psychology, to which we now turn.¹⁴

Deliberately creating an arbitrary sign does not provide it with any permanence. For intelligence is governed by time, and its products are always transient.

Just as recollection transforms an immediate impression into a representation by connecting a retained image with a current intuition, retentive memory transforms the single coupling of an intuited sign with its “reference” into one that can recur and so become universal. The sign becomes a name that designates this particular repeatable connection. Reproductive memory now moves from name to its meaningful subject matter and back again without having to rely on any mediating intuition, imagination or impression.¹⁵ As a result, signs as words come to be associated *with each other*, not on the basis of any intuited similarity in their phenomenal sound or shape, but because the intellect becomes aware of the way these meanings on their own are connected to each other. It is this move, where the mind breaks free from images and impressions and relies just on the signs, that opens the possibility of thinking conceptually. But on its way to genuinely free thought, intelligence requires a further activity: mechanical memory – the ability to recite a string of words without having to pay any attention at all to their meaning.

This move to a type of intellectual activity which is “mindless” has always seemed paradoxical to Hegel interpreters. For it conflicts with our tendency to assume that Hegel simply adds positive function to positive function in his phenomenology and psychology. Nonetheless, mechanical memory introduces at this point a peculiarly Hegelian move,

one which distinguishes his thought from that of so many others. From his perspective, individuals and societies develop and progress only when they regularly experience dark nights of negativity. So, here, after the intellectual discipline of creating signs and bonding each with a particular "reference," that bond is simply dissolved.

In mechanical memory, sign and meaning are no longer continually held together by an active synthesis in the mind. The difference between them collapses. The words by themselves suffice, and meaning can be ignored. But (and here we have another distinctively Hegelian move) that collapse of meaning into its associated word has as its inverse the collapse of the word or sign into its meaning.¹⁶ On the most basic level, while we are reciting words mechanically our thoughts are free to wander where they will. But this also leads into the ability to think without words, focusing simply on the meanings involved. In other words, when we memorize mechanically we are learning how to think without having to express our thoughts in publicly perceptible signs. Since the distinction between word and meaning has collapsed, we are free to think thoughts without words, just as we can mouth words without thoughts. By the medium of mechanical memory, intelligence moves from the creation of a language as a way of expressing our intentions to the discipline of thinking.

Before we turn to the *Logic* to investigate how logical thought itself functions, we should recall that the content thought, in Hegel's analysis, is ultimately derived from the immediate impressions and feelings that trigger intuition. Attention discriminates spatio-temporal units or images of this content from each other; recollection recognizes recurrences of the same or similar images; imagination synthetically combines such content both subconsciously and deliberately on the basis of similarities and contiguities that it manifests. And the universals thus generated out of the raw material of our experience become meanings signified by names, and (in due course) concepts thought. But in every case the similarities noticed and the associations made are ultimately derived from material initially felt and intuited. Hegel's psychology describes the various kinds of activities by which intelligence *transforms* the *content* of muffled feeling into articulate reflection; but it never abandons this content.

In sum, a word signifies a synthesis of imagination which, by associating several representations, is universal. The synthesis involved in signification collapses into a unity through the "second nature" of mechanical memory and thereby becomes the raw material for understanding concepts, forming judgments and drawing inferences. Through this sequence

of activities intelligence will not only grasp and explain what it is thinking, but be able to recognize its internal necessity.

III

The summary of §467¹⁷ contained in that last paragraph does not tell us what it means to be logical, and what thought must do to render more precise the vagueness and ambiguity of everyday speech. To discern which functions make up a scientific method according to Hegel we must turn instead to the *Science of Logic*.

Let us begin that investigation by considering Hegel's favourite word: *Aufheben* or sublate. It is now conventional wisdom that this term for Hegel means not only "cancel" but also "retain." This double entendre was not Hegel's construction: "*Aufheben* has in normal speech the double sense: that it means something rather like 'preserve,' 'retain,' and at the same time something rather like 'let stop,' 'make an end of.'"¹⁸ Hegelian scholarship ever since has transformed *aufheben* – or its English equivalent "sublate" – into a terminus technicus. It is used to designate all kinds of logical transitions in an almost magical way. By a wave of this wand, it seems, any peculiarly Hegelian move can be justified. Unfortunately, in most cases one knows what one starts with and where one ends, but the transition dignified by this name has no clear structure or pattern. To understand Hegel's logic we need to figure out what really happens in this manoeuvre.

The remark where Hegel discusses this term is added to a subsection called "The *Aufheben* of Becoming" in which coming to be and passing away reveal themselves to be in equilibrium. "Nothing" on its own shows itself to be "being," and so being comes to be; "being" on its own turns out to be "nothing," and so being passes away. These two movements balance each other, creating a circle from nothing to being and back again. On the one hand that circle simply makes explicit what is involved in the term "becoming." But on the other hand, with two equally balanced transitions continually leading into each other, the whole cycle becomes a serene unity. The "bacchanalian frenzy, ... in which, to the extent that each member gets separated out, it is immediately dissolved, is just as much a transparent and simple rest."¹⁹ The simplicity of that unity makes of it a new, distinctive, single thought, with its own content; and the appropriate name for that thought is *Dasein* (which I tend to translate as "a being").

At this point in the *Logic*, *Aufheben* names this intellectual move, in which a circle created by two dynamic transitions in equilibrium collapses

into a peaceful unity that has its own simplicity. The earlier moments are retained, though their isolation is dissolved and they are incorporated into a more comprehensive concept. Hegel expands on this kind of transition at the end of the Doctrine of Essence, where reciprocity is the necessary and sufficient condition for the emergence of a concept. He returns to the theme in 1831 earlier in the Doctrine of Being, when reworking the conclusion of his discussion of magnitude. In 1812 he had pointed out that, not only had the analysis of quality led over to quantity, but that the discussion of quantity in its turn led back to the question of quality. He now adds:

For the totality to be *posited*, a *double* transition is required, not only of one determination into its other, but equally the transition of this other – its return – into the first. Through the first the identity of the two is only implicitly present; – quality is contained in quantity, but it thereby is only a one-sided determinacy. That this latter is conversely contained in the first, that it equally is only as sublated, emerges in the second transition – the return into the first. This remark on the necessity of the *double* transition is of great importance for the whole of the scientific method.²⁰

By using these later texts to throw light on Hegel's remark, we can see that *Aufhebung* involves integrating such double transitions into a single, unified concept.²¹

To be sure, in the texts I have cited the term *aufheben* has also been used for other purposes – not for the collapsing of two reciprocal movements in equilibrium into a peaceful unity, but for what happens in each transition on its own. Being “sublates itself” in moving to nothing, and vice versa. Quality is retained “as sublated” in quantity just as quantity is retained “as sublated” in quality. What is involved in these other uses of the term?

To get this clear we return to the beginning of the *Logic*. Thinking pure indeterminate being turns out to be thinking nothing; and when we think pure nothing, indeterminate nothing *is* in our mind so that this empty thought is the same as the one we had when thinking pure being. In other words we discover that being has gone over to nothing; yet nothing has equally gone over to being. This suggests that they are identical. Yet being and nothing are supposed to be *not* the same but distinguished absolutely from each other. In other words each has disappeared into its opposite. It is this movement – this passing-over or disappearance, picking up only one side of the meaning of *aufheben* – that must be identified

by the logic and given a name. The name that fits such a movement is "becoming."

So Hegel also uses *aufheben* for a becoming that "makes an end of" an original thought in moving on to its contrary. It describes what he elsewhere calls "dialectical reason," for "the *dialectical* moment is the proper self-sublation [*Sichaufheben*] of such finite determinacies and their passing over into their opposites."²²

Dialectic is not sufficient, however, for, if it is to recognize that this is a "becoming" thought must reflect on what has gone on and identify what connects the two extremes – the transition that exposes the inseparability of the opposites. In other words, dialectic leads on to "the speculative or positively rational," which "grasps the unity of the determinations in their opposition – the affirmative that is contained in their dissolution and their passing over."²³

Speculative reason also seems to be involved when thought later takes the two forms of becoming – coming to be and passing away – and recognizes that, together, they make up an equilibrium of reciprocal processes. But something more than speculation is required when this balanced circle collapses into the new *immediate* unity which Hegel calls *Dasein*. For in calling it unmediated Hegel is setting aside all the mediation involved in moving from being to nothing and back again – all the mediation captured in the term "becoming" as the transition from one moment to another. This mediation "disappears," he says. In other words, thinking the circle as a serenely simple unity involves abstracting it from all the conditions that led up to it. Abstraction is not the work of speculative reason, whose role is to grasp the inherent unity within an opposition. It is rather the product of understanding, for understanding "remains steadfastly with a fixed determination and its difference vis-à-vis anything else; such a delimited abstraction marks it as something that persists on its own as a being."²⁴

The sublating move, in which a reciprocal cycle collapses into a new simple unity, is not primarily the work of speculation, then, but of understanding.²⁵ So we should not be surprised when, after completing the Doctrine of Essence with a discussion of reciprocity, and having put his introductory comments on the Doctrine of Conceiving behind him, Hegel opens his chapter on the Concept with the words: "the faculty of conceiving in general used to be given the name 'understanding.'" After then discussing how Kant had distinguished the understanding from reason, not as the faculty of conceiving in general but as the faculty of determinate concepts, in contrast to judgment and inference, and noting that judgments and syllogisms, as formal, are also the work of

understanding, Hegel concludes: "the concept does not function here, however, as something merely abstractly determinate; as a result understanding is to be distinguished from reason only to the extent that the former is simply the faculty of conceiving in general."²⁶

This identification of the faculty which conceives concepts in general with understanding is then confirmed when Hegel places his logical discussion of both abstraction and understanding within the subsection on the Particular Concept; indeed the chapter on the concept ends only when understanding has isolated an abstract universal and opposed to it a related non-conceptual singular to form a judgment – "Gaius is a human" – thus introducing Hegel's discussion of the equally abstract forms of judgments and syllogisms.

We can now draw our lessons from this analysis of Hegel's logical method. In logic one starts from an abstracted concept that is to be understood. From this emerges in the second place dialectical transitions: from this abstract thought into its contrary, and from this contrary back to the original thought. Thirdly, speculative reflection on the whole movement recognizes a synthetic connection between the two contraries. Finally there is a distinctively Hegelian move which develops when contrary transitions stand in reciprocal equilibrium, each leading into the other. Through the work of understanding this double transition collapses into a peaceful simplicity which, as a new immediate concept, abstracts from its past.²⁷

IV

We now return to our original question: How is the rationality of logical thought related to the contingency of language? Why is it that language is implicitly rational, even though everyday speech must be purified before it can be used logically?

When we compare the elements of Hegel's psychology with the various moments of the logical method we find some instructive parallels. In the first place, the basic transitions of dialectic correspond to the associations of reproductive memory. Within the stream of consciousness one picture follows another without any purposive direction from intelligence. In a similar way, the simple dialectical transitions from one thought to its contrary simply happen. When Hegel says: "being does not pass over into nothing and nothing into being – but has passed over,"²⁸ he is suggesting that thought only discovers after the fact that the transition has taken place. It was not deliberately intended. To be sure, there is a significant difference between the two forms of intellectual

movement: the impressions and representations of imagination are affected by the contingent circumstances of the original intuitions; while the intellect moves on to other related images and ideas, these others are not strictly opposites as they are in pure thinking. Nevertheless, for all that one case involves pure thought thinking and the other imagination representing, in both the transitions of dialectic and the associations of psychology the intellect moves directly from one conception to another.

A second parallel can be found for the speculative moment which grasps the unity of the contraries. This corresponds to the explicit syntheses produced by allegorizing fantasy, for in both cases differing thoughts are deliberately combined into a single perspective. Yet once again the differences are significant. For fantasy creatively and freely combines representations according to its imaginative whims, whereas speculation is reflecting on the contraries that have emerged from the moves of dialectical reason and considers them within a single perspective.²⁹ Only so can reasoning hope to remain within the realm of pure logical thought, where each moment is in some sense the necessary condition for its successor. In the second type of speculation, where two *reciprocal* processes are combined into a single cycle, the synthesis acquires even more of a justification by the fact that each of the contraries leads over to its counterpart on the grounds of pure thought alone. Nonetheless, it is the synthetic activity of intelligence that is functioning in both fantasy and speculation.

What about the peculiarly Hegelian move in which the reciprocal cycle collapses into a simple unity – into a new immediate concept? Prepared for by the balanced interplay of two reciprocal moments, it would seem to be an activity peculiar to pure thought alone. But on closer inspection it too has its parallel. For mechanical memory as well is able to unite name and meaning into a single thought because in reproductive memory the intellect “has and recognizes the subject matter in the name and the name with the subject matter, without any intuition or image.”³⁰ As in logical *Aufheben*, because sign and meaning each leads over into its counterpart in a reciprocal process the stage is set for the uniting function of mechanical memory.

In other words, the three functions of logical thought are specific forms of more general intellectual activities which can be found also in imagination and memory. In the *Logic* they are applied specifically within the realm of pure thought rather than emerging within the realm of intuition and representation.

The answer to our original question is now at hand: how is ordinary language related to logical thought? Language, as we have seen, is the work

of sign-making fantasy, building on reproductive imagination and poetic fantasy. But in principle the functions of these activities are no different from functions of logical thought. So the intellectual activities by which thought comes up with new concepts *as processes* are the same as those by which in everyday experience a culture comes up with a new word.

But it is not simply processes that are the same. When we came to the end of our discussion of Hegel's psychology we noted that the content acted upon by the various intellectual activities is ultimately grounded in the muffled impressions which underlie intuition and are isolated by the focus brought by attention. In other words the content being thought is continuous with the content of intellectual experience recollected, represented and remembered. And it is this same content, now liberated from sensual content by way of mechanical memory, that, within pure thought, becomes the focus of understanding, undergoes dialectical transitions, and is amenable to speculative synthesis.

This suggests that when the immediate transitions of the dialectic – from “being” to “nothing,” from “some” to “other,” from “actuality” to “possibility,” or from “universal” to “particular” – simply happen, they are grounded in the cumulative totality of past human experience that has worked its way into the collective subconscious through the shared use of language.³¹ It is, then, no wonder that ordinary speech can provide the vocabulary for the science of logic, obviating the need for technical terms.

What distinguishes logical thought from everyday speech, however, is the abstractive power of the understanding. For it is the understanding that draws clear distinctions, isolating individual terms from their context and fixing their determinations and their differences from other related terms.³² This does not regularly happen in conventional discourse.

The difference is twofold. On the one hand, the understanding takes the content generated by the various operations of the intellect, and isolates it from the mediating circumstances that generated it in the first place. It is not interested in the chance circumstances of the original intuitions, the creative initiatives that generated new metaphors and analogies, or the peculiar history of the thinking subject. It pays strict attention to the thought alone – what we have called the meaning or sense. And it analyzes and distinguishes the conceptual content that makes it up – the universals generated by representation and imagination. This work of conceptual analysis transforms the thought from a simple representation, supported by a particular image or experience, into a universal significance that can be communicated and discussed without reference to particular experiences.

As Frege points out, if thoughts are simply reflections of our impressions (or representations and *Vorstellungen*), then no two people are thinking the same thing when they use the word "horse."³³ It is understanding that separates the conceptual content from the particular and contingent associations of individual minds and makes it potentially universal. Indeed it is precisely by drawing distinctions and clarifying what a thought is *not* that our intellect can make clear and precise exactly what is intended. Such negative relations are not presented directly to our senses or intuition. They never become impressions (to use Hume's word). They result rather from comparisons made by the mind, from drawing contrasts and differences using the abstracting capacity of the understanding as it isolates concepts.

It is this clarity that logical thought brings to ordinary language, and which distinguishes Hegel's systematic concepts from conventional German usage.

But there is a second function of the understanding which is equally important. For it not only discriminates; it collapses a synthesis into an integrated unity. It takes a synthesis of the imagination, says Kant, and unites it into a single concept.³⁴ But, as we have seen, Hegel has taken this further. Pure thought finds that concepts, when isolated by the understanding, lead over to other contrary thoughts. When a dialectical move starts from the abstracted concepts of the understanding, it can only build on, and react to, the sense or meaning contained in that initial thought. And further reflection discerns a whole network of interconnecting significance, which can be thought as one complex synthesis. Through *Aufhebung*, says Hegel, the understanding collapses that complexity into a new simple concept, integrating into a single thought the whole network of meanings that previously were only associated with one another.

This means that, as the logic develops, it comes to new concepts that are derived from the dynamics of pure thought on its own. On the one hand, the content or sense of these concepts has its distant origin in the work of intuition, imagination and representation. So there will probably be, somewhere in public discourse, terms which contain some of its strands. On the other hand, because understanding has isolated and abstracted particular aspects of sense and meaning from cultural and personal associations, the new thought will not necessarily pick up all that is involved in the conventional use of any word; indeed, it may show that there are subtle differences that need to be noted because they bear systematic significance: between "being," "a being," "existence," "actuality" and "object," for example.

Because everyday life disdains the discipline of understanding, the language it uses is riddled with vagueness and ambiguity. So it is not surprising that, far from rejecting understanding in the *Logic* in favour of reason, whether dialectical or speculative, as is often maintained, Hegel rather affirms its critical importance:

Analysing a representation, as it was usually carried out, involved nothing more than sublating the form of its familiar being. To set out a representation into its original elements involves [the shift of tense is significant] going back to its moments, which do not have in the least the form of the representation as presented, but make up the immediate possession of the self. This analysis, to be sure, arrives only at *thoughts*, which are themselves familiar, fixed and serene determinations. But what is thus *divorced* and so itself unreal is an essential moment; for only by virtue of the fact that the concrete divides itself and makes itself unreal can it be what is self-moving. This activity of separation is the might and labour of the *understanding*, the most wonderful and the greatest, or better the absolute, power. The circle which rests enclosed in itself and contains its moments as substance is the immediate, and so not at all a marvellous relationship. But that whatever is accidental when separated from its surroundings – whatever is actual only as connected in its interrelation with others – achieves its own *Dasein* and separated freedom, therein lies the monstrous power of the negative; it is the energy of thinking, of the pure I. Death, if we so want to name that unreality, is what is most fearsome, and to hold firmly to death is that which requires the greatest might. Powerless beauty hates the understanding, because it asks of her what she is not able to fulfil. But it is not the life that shies away from death and maintains itself pure from such destruction, but the life that endures death and maintains itself therein, that is the life of spirit.³⁵

It is understanding, then, that transforms the contingencies of language, and enables thought to explore the necessities of pure reason. By setting aside all that is accidental and contingent, and by focusing solely on the content being thought, it sets the stage for the transitions of dialectic and the speculative syntheses of speculative reason. It enables the intellect to move beyond the accidental associations of representations and ideas to the integrity of concepts.

Indeed, when we examine closely the development of Hegel's *Logic* we find that, in many cases, thought moves on from one concept to the next because we have found that there are unwanted contingencies

implicit in the terms we are investigating. When we are thinking of “some” we are aware that there are others which have been excluded, so the term is relative and incomplete. When we try to find the right quantity to specify a quality by using a ruler, we notice that the standard adopted is itself a matter of arbitrary choice, and so we look for a kind of measuring that is inherent in the objects being measured. When we examine the necessity involved whenever a set of conditions becomes a real possibility such that the resulting actual *has to* come into being, we soon realize that those conditions have been simply presupposed; not themselves justified, they remain contingent. The logic advances because the understanding notices such relative contingencies and proposes new strategies to avoid them.

Nonetheless there is a way that pure thought itself can be affected by contingencies. We have argued that the content of our thoughts is ultimately derived from the content of our intuitions, even though that content has been taken up into universals of a more and more abstract nature. If we take that fact seriously, and entertain the possibility that humans may encounter experiences of a novel kind, or notice details previously missed when they turn their attention to the world, then it is possible that new kinds of thoughts may emerge that could not have been included in previous systematic descriptions.

An example of this can be found in Hegel’s discussion of measure.³⁶ For a critical section is titled “Elective Affinity.” This term had become a central concept in chemistry in the late seventeenth century, when the Swede Torbern Bergmann studied the relative ability of bases and acids to replace one another in salts, and concluded, for example, that sulphuric acid had a greater affinity for barium sulphate than for potash.³⁷ It was taken up as a more general principle in Goethe’s novel *Elective Affinity*, which explored the way two couples, when brought together into a single milieu, might exchange partners because each man found himself more greatly attracted to the other woman, and vice versa. It is this principle, now divorced from its contingent associations in chemistry or literature, that Hegel takes up as a stage within the logical enterprise of measuring. But it was not available to reflective thought before Bergman had drawn people’s attention to the phenomena fifty years before Hegel was writing. In appropriate circumstances, then, contingencies can come to be incorporated into the necessity of the *Logic*.

Pure thought – the instrument of philosophy – seeks to overcome the contingencies of chance experience and to enter into the realm of necessity, where one concept follows another simply from the demands of conceptual thought itself. It can do so only because the intellectual

operations it uses have already been at work transforming the immediate intuitions of experience into the representations and imaginative syntheses of our ordinary mental lives, and then capturing the results within the framework of our language. It is because it is already familiar with the strategies of the intellect that the understanding is so effective in isolating our thoughts from all the contingencies that might contaminate them.

Yet that move away from contingency can never escape the fact that the content of all thinking ultimately comes from our experience. We can never be sure that we have already mastered everything there is to know about pure thought. For new and novel experiences may surprise us with new distinctions and new phenomena that need to be identified and grasped if we are to think effectively. These distinctions need not simply be names for new things found in the world. They can represent new ways of thinking that are forced upon us by the world in which we live because our logic has made us more perceptive. Once noticed and incorporated into our arsenal, they become essential aspects of our reasoning.³⁸ For all that pure thought seeks to rise above contingencies, it can never escape them altogether.

7

Absolute Idea

In the course of the last chapter we have had occasion to talk about Hegel's logical method. His own discussion of that theme takes place in the final chapter of his *Science of Logic*, where he talks about "the Idea" as valid in all respects. All earlier concepts within the logic have been shown to be partial and relative. When the understanding put them under its microscope, each one was found to require reference to some other concept to be complete, and so their meaning is contingent on that relationship. The only concept that holds in all contexts is the method reasoning uses, when it examines and reflects on its own thoughts.

Hegel has arrived at this final stage after exploring the basic concepts we use to characterize things, whether thoughts or entities in the real world. We talk about determinations or qualities, numbers or quantities; we measure, and distinguish what is essential from what is inessential, existence from appearance, the necessary from the contingent. Eventually we come to talking about substance and accidents, cause and its effect and reciprocal interaction.

When we have a network of reciprocal interactions, we find we are thinking of a single thing, which nonetheless incorporates a number of distinct moments, mutually influencing each other. So it is equally something general, capturing that which all its various moments share. By integrating them in a particular way, it sets itself off as a distinctive universal, which can be called a particular.

So Hegel has reached the thought of something that (i) captures what is common to a number of constituents, (ii) integrates them into a singular totality and (iii) does so in a particular way. This whole network is not something simply found in the various components, but discovered in their interaction. The diversity of their being is united into a single thought through the work of reflection. The term from our language

that captures this dynamic relationship between being and reflection is "concept," for when we conceive something we are integrating a number of givens into an individual way of understanding them.

Once he turns to thinking about the process of conceiving, Hegel is able to take up the language of traditional logic: universals, particulars and singulars, judgments and syllogisms. All of that is the way subjective thought integrates a diversity of interacting moments into conceptual structures. But thought also uses these structures to think about how beings are objectively organized: multiples are organized mechanically, chemically and teleologically so that they fit into larger wholes. While the ultimate goal of syllogistic inference is to reach something that holds objectively, however, the purpose of using mechanical and chemical means to accomplish our ends is to make objectivity fit our subjective concepts. So the first part of this final book involves a transition from subjectivity to objectivity, while the second part takes the reverse move. The combination of both reciprocal movements is the thought of something that combines an objective organization with the integrity of conceptual subjectivity. The term from the tradition that best fits this network of meanings is "Idea." For Plato, an Idea is not simply something that can be thought, but it captures the truth of reality. For Kant, an Idea is a principle that governs the way we should investigate the world, even though it does not articulate particular answers to that investigation.

However, "Idea" is not the only word that picks up the integration of subjectivity and objectivity that has emerged in his investigation. "Life" also names an objective process that is governed by a subjective dynamic. The two sides are integrated within any living individual. This first immediate unity then breaks apart into what Hegel calls the idea of cognition, where subjective thinking (or the theoretical idea) seeks to reconstruct in its own thinking the ideal truth of objective reality on the one hand, and where subjective practice (or the practical idea) seeks to reproduce in the objective realm its conception of the ideal good, on the other.¹

The *absolute* idea brings together into a single identity those two ideals. Both the theoretical and the practical idea turn out to involve a striving that never reaches its goal, for the quest for truth is bedevilled by the contingencies of subjectivity, while the quest for the good finds itself frustrated by the contingencies of the objective world. As in the absolute knowing of the *Phenomenology*, the absolute idea integrates the theoretical and the practical. The contingencies of subjectivity need to be constrained by our rational implementation of the ideal, while our practical action needs to take account of independent nature through our quest for knowledge. In other words, the two quests are not simply diverse aspects

of a confusing and confused human nature, but rather complementary processes, where each corrects and modifies the failures of the other. They are reciprocal moments within a single, comprehensive dynamic. It is this dynamic that is discussed in the final chapter on the absolute idea. Like the idea of life, it unites subjectivity and objectivity, but it does so only by taking account of the inherent opposition that drives the reciprocal processes of cognition and action.

Philosophy is the human activity that explores this complex process, for it articulates in thought the inherent, rational dynamic that underlies all things. That dynamic can be found, present in the existing world, as nature and the human spirit. In its comprehensive integrity it is given expression through artistic creation and religious practice. But because philosophy works with the rich rationality of conceptual thought, it alone can demonstrate how all things are interrelated, yet maintain their distinct independence. In doing so it requires the logic, for, in the realm of pure thought, it shows how an original logos or rationality becomes something other – a word is uttered – but also how this other in its turn becomes fully transparent and disappears back into its own conceptual realm. The ultimate core of pure thought is this rich pattern, the form of all rationality. And so the only thing that the chapter on the absolute idea has to expound is the method of philosophical thought – the inherent structure of this all-comprehensive process.

At this stage in Hegel's argument, what he calls the "method" is not an external form applied to some alien content. It is now a description of the course taken by any given content or object being thought, as it moves through all its forms. For each stage shows its untruth in that it passes over into something else. The world is not made up of fixed objects that stand as some kind of eternal foundation. It is rather constituted out of a continuing process in which beginnings pass over into something else, only to have both reconnected by a structure of mutual implication and reciprocity. The method Hegel is talking about, then, is nothing else but the rational articulation of the dynamic that is present universally in all things.

We start from a beginning. Any beginning is simply there. If it had a background it would no longer be the beginning, but a stage on the way. So it is, as beginning, unmediated, simple and universal. This is its particular characteristic; but it is also its basic flaw. For a universal is supposed to be comprehensive; so when we have a simple one, it is recognized as abstract, as lacking any rich content, as negatively excluding what it ought to contain. This initiates the rational drive to move further. For the universal must become more determinate on its own account.

The beginning, then, contains the seed of its own development. Because anything universal is to be a concrete totality, its immediate simplicity stands in contrast to the differences and diversity that it requires. That difference stands over against the immediate beginning as its opposite. In one sense, the moment of differentiation simply spells out what is implicit in the simple universal with which we began. It is the result of analysis. But in another sense, any differentiation introduced is not contained in the original simplicity. It is something new, a novel contingency. So to say that the beginning is differentiated is a synthetic statement; we are bringing together two items that are different from each other.

This, says Hegel, is the dialectical moment. In Plato's dialectic, Socrates draws out analytically from an initial statement its implicit implications. But these turn out to be sharply opposed to what was originally intended. They introduce contingent novelty – and result in a contradiction. What were supposed to be self-identical turn out to be radically opposed. This structure of dialectical thinking soon became the foundation of all scepticism, for it shows that any beginning, whether from intuition and sense experience or from the assumptions of pure thought, will produce its opposite. This second, dialectical moment within the method is characterized by negativity – the production of otherness. Yet it follows from the original negativity embedded in the abstract simplicity of the beginning. So there is an implicit relationship that underlies the sceptical contradiction.

This is the turning point that leads us forward. For the otherness of the contradiction depends on the integrity of the original beginning; and the simplicity of that beginning requires differentiation and complexity. For all their opposition they presuppose and require each other. The contradictory negation is itself negated, not by some kind of alien puppeteer but by the rational nature of the content itself. We have a double transition, from simplicity to complexity and from complexity back to simplicity. That reciprocity makes up a single whole which incorporates the dialectical negativity within it; as a whole it can be considered on its own as a new, immediate beginning. Its integrity is no longer that of a thing, but of movement and activity. It is an immediate that has taken its mediation up into itself; it is a simple that absorbs the diversity that emerged. This second move would seem to be synthetic – since it brings opposites together. But it is equally analytic; for it simply makes explicit the implicit relationship that underlies the contradiction.

It is because immediate simplicity is reconstituted in the third moment that Hegel can talk about a system. Contingency surfaces at the second, dialectical, moment, when otherness introduces something new.

That contingency, however, is reintegrated into a new universal, which becomes a new beginning. This new starting point, for all that it incorporates the differentiating mediation of its past, is nonetheless, as a beginning, simple and abstract; so the pattern repeats. New differences emerge, and need to re-establish an intimate relationship with their origin. We move on to ever greater complexity, showing how all kinds of stages and things are interconnected.

Just as each of the two moves in the method – from simplicity to difference, and from contradiction to reciprocal relationship – can be characterized as both analytic and synthetic, so this systematic development has two contrary characteristics. On the one hand, as analysis produces more and more differentiated content to be incorporated, we have an enrichment of detail as thoughts and things become increasingly comprehensive. But on the other hand, as more distinct details are absorbed into the dynamic of reciprocal transitions and movements, we have an increasing simplicity. Ultimately, the final achievement of pure reason, in its voyage of self-analysis, is the simple process of the genuine method. All independent content has been dissolved into its simple fluidity. We have that which is simply related to itself; because it incorporates any determinate content that emerges, it is itself indeterminate. There is nothing else to be contrasted with it. But, in Hegel's *Logic*, simple indeterminate self-relation is the definition of "being." So the systematic development ends by returning to the beginning, no longer as abstract being per se, but as being that incorporates all conceptual determinations.

It would seem that the method has reached its terminus. There is nothing else to be determined. It is not simply the absolute way we have to think, but much more THE absolute in which all finitude and all objectivity has been transcended.

Hegel, however, does not make that move. For the simple immediacy of the method is itself flawed and incomplete. It is, after all, the method of conceptual thought, of pure reason. Even though it has incorporated "objectivity," "existence" and "actuality," all of these have been concepts generated out of other concepts through the transitions that emerge when we think rationally. The dynamic of reason has been rendered transparent; all its distinct moments have been seen to be simply stages in a fluid dynamic. The absolute idea is enclosed in pure thought. But that, in itself, already defines its basic flaw. For thought can already anticipate that there might be a realm that is not simply the work of pure reason: where things are externally related, and where there is no such thing as mutual implication, but independent entities merely exist one beside the other. While thought can recognize such a possibility, it cannot simply pass over

into it, in the way the dialectic creates difference. Were it to try to do so, it would simply produce another thought that would become a part of its own inner life; and that would leave it just as far from any alien other that lies outside its one-sided simplicity. This other would be a realm that is not at all characterized by thought, for it is a totality, in that it is, in the first instance, everything that is not conceptual thought. We call this other "nature." But thought cannot get to it by means of a straightforward move of rational implication. "This determination is no coming to be or transition in the way the subjective concept requires objectivity or subjective teleology leads on to the concept of life," Hegel writes.

On the other hand, the absolute idea, which has incorporated all conceptual determinations into its own fluidity, is completely self-determined and self-determining. In other words, it is free. In this freedom, with absolute self-confidence, pure thought can make itself redundant.² This is no transition to something other. It is rather an openness to pure externality – to that which is not rational thought at all. To that which, from the standpoint of pure reason, is radical contingency. This, it turns out, is the externality of space and time.

Pure thought recognizes that this natural spatio-temporal realm is its own other. For all its openness to whatever nature turns out to be, it also knows that this alien reality can be described using terms from its own arsenal. The otherness can be characterized as "other," as "finite," as "absolutely different," as "contingent," as "particular," as "objective." All of these terms have emerged within the self-explication of pure thought within the logic. And because, having declared itself redundant, thought is now open to what is genuinely different from its own internal network of relations, it can recognize that these conceptual terms must be combined with what we actually discover to produce new and different terms that capture what is distinctive about nature. By taking these steps, it can comprehend the rationality inherent within nature – the realm of pure externality; and it can eventually show how that externality in turn sets the stage for independent spatio-temporal beings that are integrated and able to comprehend diversity – how within the realm of nature there can be found a distinct realm of spirit. For all that this final move of the absolute idea is a move to that which is different from itself, it knows that this, too, will turn out to be amenable to the absolute method: the pure beginning of thought, aware of its partiality, will open itself to that which is its contradiction, and then the two sides will explicate their reciprocal relationship.

So when Hegel says that nature is the idea in its otherness or externality, he is simply saying that the absolute method still functions, even

when thought turns to that which is radically other than thought, even when thought declares itself redundant.

Contingency, then, is not alien to the rationality of pure thought. In one sense it is present in the synthetic move of the absolute method, for any difference is new and contingent relative to the simple, immediate beginning. But more critically, when pure thought completes its pilgrimage, it realizes that there is a realm of contingency that is quite alien to its internal necessity; and it realizes as well that this alien contingency will nonetheless be amenable to some kind of rational comprehension.

If we are going to move beyond this general perspective to the particular ways in which radical contingency can be incorporated into the Hegelian system, we need to explore how pure logic works when applied to nature and the human spirit. Hegel helps us out in this quest, for in the *Logic* he has chapters on mechanism, chemism and life, on teleology and cognition. All of these terms are familiar to us as ways of characterizing the natural and social world. Yet he has spelled out their meaning within the dynamic of thought functioning simply on its own. At the same time, within *Philosophy of Nature* and the *Philosophy of Spirit* he discusses mechanics and chemistry, botany and zoology, history and human intelligence. Even the terms used suggest that there is both similarity and difference. In the next chapters we shall take four of these chapters from the *Logic* and set them beside comparable texts from his philosophy of the real world, to see how pure thought can do justice to the contingency of space and time.

8

Chemism and Chemistry

One of the enduring puzzles about Hegel's system is the relationship between his *Science of Logic* and his *Philosophy of Nature*.¹ What happens when he turns from the realm of pure concepts to space and time, matter and magnetism, chemical change and living creatures? Does thought simply follow its normal a priori pathway, deriving "natural" concepts in the same way that it generated "logical" terms? If, instead, philosophy takes account of the contingent givens of experience, how is it different from natural science? What does the philosophy of nature provide that mechanics and physics, chemistry and zoology do not already offer?

Indeed, it was at precisely the point where his system moves from one to the other that some of the earliest criticisms were directed. Shortly after Hegel's death, his former colleague, Friedrich Schelling, attacked his transition from the *Logic* to the *Philosophy of Nature*: "While the logical self-determination of the concept (and what a concept!) endures (as might be expected) as long as the system proceeds within the merely logical, as soon as it has to take the difficult step into reality, the thread of the dialectical movement breaks off completely. A second hypothesis becomes necessary, namely that it occurs to, or strikes the fancy of, the Idea (one knows not why if not to break the boredom of its merely logical being) to let itself fall apart into its moments whence nature should originate."² For Schelling, the contingency of existence is quite other than thought, and cannot be derived purely a priori from logical principles. On this basis, Hegel's systematic move from the end of the logic into the philosophy of nature is invalid because it assumes that thought can determine what actual existence will be like.

Yet it was Schelling who popularized the discipline called the philosophy of nature, even though the project had been initiated by Immanuel Kant. In the *Metaphysical Principles of Natural Science*, Kant started from

the concept of "body" and then, using the table of categories and their principles, constructed the fundamental laws of mechanics, such as conservation of mass and action and reaction. He did not, however, extend the method to chemistry or biology because those sciences had no mathematical or quantitative foundation.³

Schelling pushed further. Convinced that our sensible intuition of objects gives us direct awareness of the resistance of matter, he followed, in *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*,⁴ a Kantian method of construction: first, developing a priori the basic structures of chemistry; then analyzing empirical evidence to "prove" its validity. This approach, involving both construction and proof, was derived from Euclid, where the geometer constructs complex figures to prove sophisticated theorems.⁵ Within a philosophy of nature, proof does not involve demonstrating a theorem, but rather showing that the evident givens of the natural world instantiate the results of logical construction.⁶

When Hegel lectured on, and wrote about, the philosophy of nature in Jena, once Schelling had left in 1803, he began by building on the approach of his mentor and colleague. The method of construction underpinned the discussion of the orbit of the planets that comprised his inaugural dissertation of 1801.⁷ And it is applied explicitly in the *Philosophies of Nature* of 1804–5 and of 1805–6.⁸

In the method of construction and proof the philosophy of nature attempts a kind of deduction of natural phenomena. Even though proof comes from the consistency between the a priori construction and the phenomena of nature, the construction is derived logically by using division.

Implicit in that method, however, was the danger of begging the question. For the description of nature used in the "proof" could well be implicitly or explicitly influenced by the a priori analysis. In that case the supposed confirmation becomes simply a reaffirmation of a prejudice already adopted on "logical" grounds.

So we are not surprised that, in the full-fledged system of the 1812–16 *Logic* and the 1817–30 *Encyclopaedia* the language of construction and proof has disappeared. Hegel has moved his logical constructions of mechanism, chemism and life into the *Science of Logic*; and the organizational structure of the *Philosophy of Nature* has its own agenda. Physics does not appear in the logic but plays a major role between mechanics and chemistry; on the other hand, the logical discussion of teleology, which bridges the gap between chemism and life in the *Logic*, has no place within the *Philosophy of Nature*.⁹ These differences suggest that the relationship between the a priori and the a posteriori has significantly shifted.

The logic is the realm of freedom: thought *determines itself* as it defines its starting points, discovers the dialectical implications, reflects on the results and speculatively brings them together with their origins, and then collapses these reciprocal relationships into new, understood concepts. Nature, in contrast, is the realm of necessity and contingency. Its phenomena are determined by the conditions that give them birth. Yet at the same time they manifest indeterminate irregularity; the concrete things we find immediately presented make up a *mélange* of properties, indiscriminately indifferent to each other. There is a powerlessness about nature, for its various forms do not develop what is implicit within them with the necessity of conceptual thought, but rather display all manner of particularities, aberrations and external conditions. If philosophy is to take nature seriously, it must do justice to this rampant contingency.¹⁰

This does not mean, however, that the philosopher simply puts himself in the hands of the scientists. For they proceed quite unreflectively, drawing out concepts and generalizations from the phenomena and organizing them into classes. They advance by drawing analogies which may be contingent or significant. Since they lack any understanding of the intrinsic structure of thought, such conclusions are simply put together in an external and ad hoc manner.¹¹

So Hegel wants to do justice to the contingencies of nature, yet comprehend them within a systematic, conceptual structure. To do so, he must escape, in some way, the following dilemma: Either the philosophies of nature and of spirit are simply extensions of the logic, and we should expect that our experience will match its a priori descriptions. Or else they are working with alien material, and we simply mine the logic for appropriate categories whenever we confront the empirical givens of experience. But in this latter case there can be little claim that a *system* is being extended; for we have lost the ability to derive one stage logically from the next, and we are subject to the developmental vagaries of scientific investigation.

To see how Hegel resolves this dilemma we shall examine those sections of the *Philosophy of Nature* that correspond directly with chapters in the *Science of Logic*. There is a logical chapter on chemism,¹² and at the same time a section on chemical process within the philosophy of nature. And the chapter on life in the *Logic* has its counterpart in the discussion of organic physics. By comparing and contrasting the method Hegel applies when considering pure thought with his approach to the specific processes of nature we can begin to discern the way Hegel applies his rational method to the contingencies of existence. To what extent does he take

the contingencies of nature seriously? And how well does he maintain the systematic quality of his philosophy?

In this chapter we shall consider his discussions of chemism and chemistry,¹³ leaving life and biology to the next. We focus on chemistry rather than mechanics because, during Hegel's lifetime, modern chemistry was in the process of establishing itself. Oxygen was isolated and named around the time of his birth; and shortly after his death Michael Faraday showed the nature of electrically generated chemical transformations. Hegel needed to be aware of current investigations if his lectures on the philosophy of nature were to be credible. We shall have to see how he took account of them.

Chemism

If Hegel means what he says when he calls his *Logic* the science of pure self-thinking thought, its chapter on Chemism cannot be directly concerned with chemical phenomena, but only with a certain way we think about objects: those objects which we think of as both independent, yet intrinsically related to each other. While chemicals may provide examples of this structure, it may be applied more generally. Hegel in his remarks refers to social relationships as well as natural ones. Indeed his contemporary, Goethe, had already done the same with a novel entitled *Elective Affinity*. Hegel uses the language of chemism, not because he is drawing conclusions from the way chemicals actually function, but because this term from ordinary speech most closely captures a specific kind relationship that can hold among objects of various sorts. Our immediate task is to follow this concept through by exploring its implications.

As the science of self-thinking thought, the *Logic* must be systematic. We have seen that this systematic nature comes from using our understanding to define any initial, immediate term, carefully working out the dialectical implications of its limits with their resulting contrary determinations, and then finding speculatively the network of reciprocal relations through which we can reconstruct a total, encompassing picture. The logical process of conceptual analysis and synthesis proceeds through an ongoing cycle of understanding, dialectic and speculative reason.

To say that a 'chemical' object must be both independent, yet oriented toward another object is, on the surface, contradictory. If it is independent, it requires no reference to anything else; and if it is oriented toward something else, then it is not independent. Rather than simply abandoning the concept of a 'chemical object'¹⁴ because of this contradiction, however, thought seeks to resolve the paradox by identifying

what kind of process or movement can move from independence to relation and vice versa.

Any such process cannot be direct or immediate. For if an object were to collapse immediately into a compound with some other object, the moment of independence would be lost. Yet if no process were possible, then the object would be isolated and atomic, mechanical rather than chemical, and the moment of reference would be lost. This dilemma is resolved if we introduce a third, or middle, term between the two objects that are oriented toward each other. This third term serves to break down their independence and to make their union possible. Without it, they remain on their own. In this way the two sides of the original description can be maintained without a logical problem. The objects are independent, but will unite with each other when the right conditions are present. In other words, we have something like a syllogism, where a middle term (called catalyst by the chemists) mediates between two extremes, allowing them to be united in a conclusion.

The *Encyclopaedia Logic* (§201) says that this syllogism can be described under each of the three basic syllogistic forms: the middle term could be a particular thing that stands between two independent singulars and their universal orientation to each other; or it could be a singular dynamic which transforms their particularity into a universal; or it could be the universality of their affinity which determines both their singular independence and their particularity as contraries within a single universal.¹⁵

The larger *Science of Logic* makes a different move, however. For it looks at the compound that results from the 'chemical process' already identified, and says that it can be a 'chemical object' only if it is itself not absolutely independent and complete, but equally amenable to some sort of process or dynamic. If the compound object that results from the first process is to continue to be some sort of 'chemical object,' it must be subject to a mediating dynamic that can break it up into its component elements. It would not then be something completely self-contained, but a union of reciprocally interacting components; and a mediating process of analysis is necessary to show what these are. So if the first process is one of combination, the second is one of separation or isolation of elements. (Notice that this whole argument has developed strictly logically. Hegel has made no appeal to experience.)¹⁶

But he goes on to a third consideration. The elements on their own turn out to be independent objects which are self-contained. Once again we are in danger of losing them as 'chemical objects;' and they will revert back to being simple mechanical atoms. If these elements are to be

'chemical' they must be differentiated among themselves, so that when they are parcelled up among different objects they produce chemical affinities and attractions; one will be the animating principle, the other its animated counterpart.

It is this third move that enables us to return to the kind of chemical object with which we began. For the result of this distribution of the elements to different objects is to make both these objects independent, yet oriented toward each other.

Having returned to the point from where we began, thought then looks at the total cycle and considers its structure. In every case we have a process, and the process terminates in a new kind of object. But that termination is not left as a final result. The concept of 'chemical object' requires that we look for a way by which each result can be the presupposition for another 'chemical process.' In other words, the whole discussion has been directed and determined by its governing concept. Once reflection makes us aware of that structure, we realize that we now need a new kind of logical term: one which names a pattern where objects are organized and manipulated according to some determining concept. For that new term we can use 'teleology,' for teleology is defined as the "view that developments are due to the purpose or design [in Hegel's language, the concept] that is served by them."¹⁷

We have now moved beyond the logic of chemism. Even though its name has been drawn from the language of science, each new step in this analysis emerged without reference to empirical evidence, but simply from reflecting on our original concept and working out what is required to remain consistent with the original definition.

Chemistry

We now turn to the discussion of "Chemical Process" in the philosophy of nature. Does it follow the same pattern? In other words, is it simply an extension of the logic? Or does thought have to abandon any claim to system, and simply describe the specific features that natural science has discovered?

We are hampered here by the fact that we have this section only in the *Encyclopaedia*; it has not received the expansion provided earlier by the *Science of Logic*. So we are presented with 11 brief paragraphs, some with extended remarks that discuss current chemical theories. Each one of the basic paragraphs is telegraphic in its conciseness, leaving to the interpreter the task of understanding the significance of its terms and how they contribute to the overall development of the text.¹⁸

In the previous section (§323–5), the discussion of electricity has identified a kind of polarization between two bodies,¹⁹ but the electrical tension introduced is immediately dissipated when a spark returns them to neutrality. At this point in the systematic development, reflective thought considers the possibility of having bodies *essentially* characterized by the fact that they are in polar tension so that any resolution of the tension transforms them into a unity.

The first four paragraphs of the new section consider the implications of this conceptual proposal. The first (§326) points out that we are talking about a relation in which non-identical, independent bodies are nonetheless bound together. To insure both their independence and their implicit unity – as the *Logic* has shown us – we need one process in which differentiated objects become identical, and another in which identical objects become differentiated.

Then (§327) Hegel sets aside a process in which the objects being combined remain the same in the compound. This happens when acids are mixed together, or metals are amalgamated. While the two objects reinforce each other, they do not stand in any kind of polar tension, nor do they become a complete unity or identity as a different kind of body, so the full requirements of the original reflection are not satisfied.

Only in the third paragraph does Hegel point out that the bodies so defined reflect the logical structure of “chemism” and “chemical object.” However, this is not the only part of the logic to which he refers. For he distinguishes this fully chemical process from simple amalgamation by drawing on a distinction, drawn in the *Logic*, between formal and real ground.²⁰ Whereas in both amalgamation and formal grounding a basic identity persists between ground and grounded, a third term is required to mediate a transformation in real grounding. And it is this latter pattern which governs the kinds of process he will explore in this section and which requires reference to the logic of chemism, setting the stage for the subsequent discussion. For, drawing on the argument outlined above from the *Logic*, it identifies the need for a catalyst or middle term as well as the fact that any differentiation will be generated by elements which are both animating and amenable to animation.

Hegel goes on to say that the middle terms or catalysts actually found in nature tend to be water or air; and the elements are fourfold: animating and animated are represented by oxygen and hydrogen; pure indifference is found in nitrogen; and pure individuality is represented by carbon. Notice that we cannot justify these various instantiations in strictly logical terms. There is nothing in the concepts analyzed that would lead us to water or air, oxygen or carbon. Nonetheless, the language

Hegel uses to describe their different functions is theoretical: uniting, separating, indifference, opposition, individuality. In other words, he looks to nature to tell him what the chemical catalysts and elements in fact are; then describes their functions using appropriate abstract vocabulary drawn from the *Logic*.

We are now beginning to move beyond a strictly theoretical reflection to some sort of reference to contingent experience. This extends further in the fourth paragraph (§329). Theoretically, or in the abstract discussion of “chemism,” separations are to be united and identities are to be separated, and these two processes serve as complementary parts of a single totality. But experience shows us that, in the chemical world, each process is independent and finite. Nature, as the opposite of thought, is impotent and does not have the inner self-determining character of logical thought, so we should not expect that even these two movements of uniting and separating will be instantiated in any simple way. To be sure, Hegel suggests that we may well find particular, independent processes that mirror each of the three forms of the syllogism: mediation by particular, by singular and by universal.²¹ But these will turn out to be a diverse number of particular processes, not three different ways of describing one process, as he had suggested in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*.

Hegel details four kinds of chemical combination, which are discussed in the next four paragraphs (§330–3). Once again, while the structure is anticipated, the concrete examples cannot be derived deductively from the logical concept. First, in galvanism, an electrical battery takes inert metals and, using water as a catalyst, produces differentiated oxides and hydrates. (The role of electricity in this process provides a nice bridge from the empirical evidence Hegel discussed in the previous section.) Second, combustion can take what were called earths (such as sulphur and calcium) and, through the catalyst of air, transform them into acids and alkalis. Third, when acids and alkalis (and on occasion oxides) are brought together they neutralize into a salt and water. One can discern in these three the mediation of particularity (the separation of water in galvanism), singularity (the dynamic of fire) and universality (the mutual attraction of acids and bases). But Hegel goes on to a fourth process: one where two salts are dissolved in water and their elements or radicals are exchanged to produce two new salts, a process called elective affinity. This final process appears to combine all three features: the salts *particularize* themselves, or divide into differentiated substances; then some kind of *singular* agency recombines them according to their elective affinities, or *universals*. While this fourth process would not have been expected from a strict application of the logic with its three syllogisms,

it nonetheless turns out to have a role to play, for it presents a movement back to the same kind of neutral objects from which it began – to salts from salts – a movement which uses all three syllogistic forms.

While the logic had led us to expect that separation (§334) would be of equal importance to combination, Hegel does not find in nature any distinctive process. Rather, each one of the processes already identified can be used to separate out basic materials. Combustion had long been used to refine metals; more recently Jacob Berzelius and Humphrey Davy had used galvanism to isolate a great number of newly identified substances, such as chlorine, potassium and sodium.

In these five paragraphs, then, Hegel takes the phenomena described by chemistry (exploring them in more detail in his lectures) and fits them into his conceptual pattern of combination and separation. But they do not fit neatly. There are four processes of combination rather than three. Separation does not present an independent process. In other words, he has taken account of what actually does happen in nature. Further, while Hegel will provide examples of these processes in his lectures, the systematic discussion does not concern itself with the details of what happens with sulphur or calcium, iron or zinc. He is interested in the *types* of chemical interaction, as they have been identified by the scientists. He accepts their classification, and seeks to show how it can be integrated into his systematic argument.

In the final two paragraphs, Hegel reflects on what has thus emerged. But he does not simply build on the universal concepts with which he started. He takes into account the general structures that are peculiar to chemistry. And he integrates the universal with these particulars in a singular reflection.

In §335 he recognizes that the result of this integration is rather similar to the concept of life as it was developed in the logic.²² We have already seen that the fourth process of combination involves beginning and ending with the same kind of chemical body: salts. We have also seen that every combination involves separation and every separation involves combination, so that the two kinds of processes are not absolutely distinct, but mutually condition each other. Further, no substance persists in its independence, but each serves as a presupposition or condition for one process and turns out to be the result of another process. One can construct a circle, for example, from iron through iron oxide and ferrous sulphide back to iron. If we put all those features together into a single picture, we are thinking of a complex process in which various bodies constitute, and are constituted by, other bodies, a dynamic in which union and separation happen simultaneously. That overall conceptual

pattern reproduces the structure analyzed in the *Logic* as “life.” Nonetheless, it is not life, for each process is independent of the others, and there is no self-perpetuating spark to both initiate it and keep it going. Each transformation is finite, and once it is completed the dynamic is exhausted. Its products turn out to be indifferent to each other. Neutral solutions do not of themselves initiate new transformations.

Nevertheless, even though we cannot claim to have reached the full concept of “life,” when we look at all the chemical processes as a totality we reach something that does resemble a concept within that logical discussion: the concept of “organism,” of a whole made up of interacting parts. Each substance and property is both an independent result of one process, yet also the necessary condition for other substances and properties through other processes. One thus comes up with the thought of a body composed of a number of substances that, being transient, are both products of, and conditions for, other components. Even though it lacks the self-generating and self-maintaining quality of life, this concept reflects key elements within the concept of an “organism.” So the next task is to return to nature using the resources of natural science and look for bodies that are non-living organisms (a conceptual combination that does not appear as such in the *Logic*). Hegel thus sets the stage for his discussion of geology.

Discussion

What has happened in these 11 paragraphs? We can group them into three sets. The first four paragraphs discuss the universal framework of the stage now reached in the philosophy of nature, and does so by drawing on concepts from the logic to clarify what needs to be looked for within nature. The next five paragraphs detail in particular what patterns are actually found in nature when looked at with an interest in chemical interaction. The final two paragraphs gather the results together conceptually into a singular totality and reflect on the way its constituent elements – both thought and scientific results – fit together; thus setting the stage for the next stop in the systematic process.

The pattern is threefold. The first four paragraphs of the section provide the universal discussion, talking about the basic principles that would be involved at this stage – drawing on the logic as appropriate. The next five paragraphs look at how this universal framework is instantiated in its particularity in external nature as it stands over against thought. That particularity reflects the “impotence” of nature, the fact that nature does not determine itself in the way logical thought does. And it does not

immerse itself in all the finite details, but focuses on the general patterns science has identified. So, with regard to chemistry, we have on the one hand the dualism of combination and separation; on the other hand we have a quartet of combinations. Finally, in the concluding two paragraphs, both the universal and the particulars are integrated in a singular reflection that identifies conceptually what would be involved if they mutually influenced each other. The task of the next section is to show how that principle in turn becomes explicit in nature.

We can now draw our conclusion. In the first place, the *Philosophy of Nature* is not simply an extension of the *Logic*. For the first part of our section does not develop new transitions but simply appeals back to concepts already handled, and draws them from various places in the *Logic*, as appropriate. When, in both the first and the second part, Hegel appeals to the results of science, there are no derivations of these instantiations logically. They are simply introduced, and discussed in his lectures, as they have been presented by scientists. The logic of itself cannot justify the introduction of the references to water or air, to galvanism or combustion, nor even to the fact that separation relies on the various processes of combination and is not itself a distinct process. We discover in nature phenomena that fit the conceptual pattern we have in mind. The final section incorporates the results of this observation of nature into a new conceptual framework.

Yet on the other hand, the philosophy of nature does not simply describe nature in its diversity. General patterns of natural phenomena are introduced as instances of a structure that thought has previously articulated; and in the end thought reflects on the total picture and incorporates both the original general considerations and the specific results of experimental evidence into a new conceptual pattern, significantly different from what appeared in the logic, but which can set the systematic stage for the next section. To be sure, this last move resembles the final move in the logic of chemism, where thought reflects on the total picture and discovers the concept of "teleology." But in the *Logic* the totality only includes moments that thought itself has differentiated, whereas in the philosophy of nature it incorporates the "contingent" givens of scientifically controlled experience. This different kind of content gives the *Philosophy of Nature* its own systematic structure, so that chemical process leads to organism and only then to living beings, whereas the *Logic* shifts first to "teleology" before coming to "life" and the organic individual.

9

Life and Biology

In the *Logic* Hegel has a chapter entitled “Life.”¹ In the *Philosophy of Nature* he discusses organic structures, starting from the geological organization of the earth and moving on to vegetables and animals. So these two discussions offer another example of the way systematic derivation works in Hegel: the way he “draws real physical rabbits out of purely metaphysical hats,” as Karl Popper would say;² or the way his method allows him to move from a strictly logical argument to considering what we discover in our study of nature. Once again we shall start with the logical discussion, this time of the concept, “life.”³ Then we shall identify where the organization of the *Philosophy of Nature* deviates from the sequence developed in the *Logic*.

Life

A. The living individual

Any logical discussion should build on elementary and basic terms that presuppose as little as possible. The primitive sense of ‘life’ that Hegel starts from is of a reality that is permeated by its concept or principle. This sense has emerged from his discussion of ‘teleology,’ in which a concept exploits objective means to achieve its realized end.⁴ When worked out in detail, teleology involves the concept completely overreaching objective reality, so that means and end are but the realized expression of its own basic dynamic. While Kant had continued to use ‘teleology’ to describe the way a unifying principle organizes and structures an objective organism so that it can maintain itself, Hegel suggests instead that this self-generating and self-maintaining dynamic requires a distinct concept. ‘Teleology’ suggests using external means to achieve

an independent goal; a whole that maintains itself through the mutual interaction of its parts is better described as 'life.'

Hegel starts, then, from this sense of 'life' as the immediate union of a subjective concept or purpose with its objective realization: the concept permeates the objective (and is to that extent universal) and, by determining how each part (or means) performs its particular function, it integrates what is objective into something singular.⁵

In reflecting on that definition logical thought notices that, since the concept integrates and the objective is integrated, the two are not strictly speaking identical, for all that they are a unity. One is agent and the other is recipient of the activity – a relationship that corresponds to the relation between subject and object in a proposition or judgment.

Given that distinction, thought explores what this relationship means for each of its components. It turns first to the predicate – to the objective moment. In this context we are not thinking about objectivity in general, a world simply organized in mechanical or chemical ways. Nor are we concerned with an alien objectivity that has to be exploited to achieve some telos or goal.⁶ In this context, the objective inheres in the subject and acquires its distinctive character from that subject, and at the same time it subsumes the subject by embodying its singularity within a more comprehensive or universal reality.⁷ The objective is a totality – all the parts that come together – but it is not a totality on its own account. The principle that integrates its totality is derived from the subject or concept that defines it.⁸

Thought now turns to the other moment – the concept or subject. This is an integrating dynamic that overwhelms the independence of the object. Hegel's term for this dynamic is "negative unity" since it unites by cancelling the independence of the various moments and in so doing it also cancels its own independence since its reality is now found in the totality. This negative unity, or integrating dynamic, is centered and singular and as such can be contrasted with the derivative totality of the objective predicate. Putting the centered singularity together with the objective totality, we find that we are thinking not of life in general but of a living individual, a singular totality.⁹

The next step is to think of the role of the subjective and the objective within the individual. Whereas before we explore their relationship in general, we now define their more specific context. As united in a judgment, the subjective is the soul of the living individual whereas the objective is its embodiment. We can spell out what this means by comparing the term as used here with objectivity in general. There, objective moments are independent, organized mechanically by external causes,

amenable to manipulation. Even where there are chemical affinities, once a chemical change has taken place the product reverts to neutral independence. Here, however, the objective is permeated by the subjective. Its moments are not discrete parts but members of an organism. As distinct, each member has its own center and acquires living individuality. But at the same time and by the same dynamic it acts on, and reacts to, other distinct, individuated members, so that each determines the nature of the others.¹⁰

Each member or part of an organism is self-determining, yet at the same time it is determined by the other members. If we take each of those statements on its own we find that they are opposites; indeed were they simply juxtaposed we would have a contradiction. For a thing cannot be both self-determining and determined by another in one and the same respect. Since such a contradiction cannot stand we must explore the ground that enables the two contrary moments to co-exist in one individual.

At the very beginning of the logic, Hegel has identified the logical move that responds to an apparent contradiction. There the two terms 'being' and 'nothing' which start out as opposites turn out to have identical meanings. That "contradiction" of being both opposites yet identical is resolved by noticing that the identity emerged as the result of a transition of thought, a becoming. By recognizing the movement from one to the other inherent in logical thought the contradiction was resolved.

In the present circumstances we again appeal to a dynamic of becoming. What specific kind of process is involved in this double determination of the members of a living individual as both determined and self-determining? Hegel answers this question by comparing this move to a similar move made in the analysis of 'teleology.' There a subjective intention appropriates some objective means in order to reach a distinctive end. Here the objective members are the means for determining the other members, which in turn determine the original member. In other words, the means used and the end to be achieved are, in the last analysis, one and the same. Indeed the dynamic process by which the members interact (as each determines itself through the others) is the individuating unity that integrates all the parts into a single being. The living individual, as an organism incorporating many members, is a process of self-production.¹¹

To an analysis of that process of self-production we now turn. We have seen that the living individual is an objective totality that is nonetheless a centered singular in that it distinguishes its various members into

a network of particular interrelations and processes. It involves a universal moment (totality), a particular moment (distinguishing members from each other) and a singular moment. To be clear on what these three moments contribute to the process of self-production we must focus on each in turn.¹²

A universal totality is open to everything, receptive to whatever happens. This pure receptivity we call sensitivity. But since it is centered parts or members that are so sensitive, the plurality received is not left as a simple collection, but integrated into a passive, yet subjective moment. So we also call this moment "feeling."¹³

Particularity involves distinguishing things from each other. The self-producing member, in being particular, must distinguish itself from other members by resisting them and reacting to them. This reactive quality, where the member centers its particular self by distancing itself from the others, we call "irritability."¹⁴

Singularity involves being centered around a single principle or concept. But as we have seen, this is achieved through a dynamic process. Sensitivity and irritability provide the alternating components of that process – the means to the end of centered individuality – not as independent but as each mutually complementing the other. The individual's members are open to each other; they react to each other, and they thereby reproduce themselves. Each is both self-determined and determined by the other. In this way they reproduce the internal structure of the living individual. For that structure is nothing other than the specific ways in which its members are both sensitive and irritated. This third moment, then, can be called "reproduction." Through sensitivity and irritability the members reproduce and reconstitute not only themselves but also the living individual as a singular, distinct, yet universal self-determining life.¹⁵

That is where the analysis of the initial concept of life has led us. It has shown us how the subjective soul and its objective embodiment are integrated in a living, self-constituting dynamic. But a moment of reflection shows that the analysis is incomplete. In talking of sensitivity and irritability we have mentioned how each member is open to everything, yet also resists otherness. But that process also constitutes the living individual as a whole. Implicit, then, is reference to an alien and independent reality, to which the centered being is sensitive and by which it is irritated. We now recognize that we have abstracted the living individual from its setting. We must explore how a living individual can interact with the non-living reality of its environment in such a way that its integrity can be maintained.¹⁶

B. The life process

The living individual responds to its environment as a centered singular with feelings and drives. As sensitive and open to everything it feels that objective reality is not absolutely alien, but rather a void to be filled with its own living dynamic. It reacts to, and tries to appropriate the other into its own life and so destroy its independence. This other, however, is not a mere creature of the living; it has its own agenda. This too is sensed and resented as an irritating resistance. So the living individual is caught in the “contradiction” of desiring to overcome the alien other and at the same time keeping itself distinct and separate from it. The subjective feeling of this contradiction is pain – “the privilege of living nature.”¹⁷

When we turn from the living individual to the non-living, objective world that is its environment, we already have some idea of how it is organized. Earlier in the *Logic* Hegel has shown that the objective realm will reflect mechanical and chemical patterns and is amenable to being teleologically used by subjective intentions. Lacking a center it is powerless before the determined attack of centered subjectivity. At our present stage, when the objective realm impinges on the living subject it does not simply act as an external cause, triggering a mechanical or chemical effect. It stimulates a centered response; it evokes irritability. At some point the two realms actually come in contact. Subjectivity and the alien realm are not absolute others each in its own world. The living finds some correspondence, if not with objectivity as a whole, at least with some parts of it.¹⁸

At these contact points the living individual, as self-determining, can exercise power over the object. It can exploit mechanical and chemical means to accomplish its purposes. But as we have seen, its purpose is the maintaining of its own members in mutual interaction. So its ultimate end is not a reorganized objective realm, but the incorporation of that alien other into its own life – its appropriation. At some point the simple mechanical and chemical processes of the environment are overwhelmed by another dynamic: the alien objectivity is assimilated into the life of the living. Those parts where a genuine contact has been made are penetrated with life. The gap between the living individual and the objective alien realm is bridged and overcome.¹⁹

So instead of being a particular – living as opposed to non-living – the living individual incorporates its other into itself. It thereby transcends its initial particularity and achieves a measure of universality. There is a commonality between what it was before, and what it is after the assimilation; yet the two are different because of the new “contingent” content that has now been incorporated into the individual. We can say

that what unites the before and after is something called 'generic life;' the 'genus' is this universality, permeated by life.²⁰

C. The genus

We have come to this initial sense of genus having talked about only one individual. Where the living individual finds itself opposed by an alien environment it knows that it is not universal. It thinks of itself as one particular thing over against another. Having assimilated that other, it has acquired a more universal status. The genus we have arrived at, then, describes what is common to the original individuality of the living being, and to the result of its assimilation of new material. As so defined, 'genus' is a very general term. It needs to be determined more precisely.²¹

The living individual as it assimilates its environment reproduces its genus. But that generic quality need not be limited to this particular sequence. There could be many similar individuals of the same generic structure, each reconstituting itself through assimilation, each interacting with its non-living environment. So the genus is not unique to this individual; and the latter can be alien not just to non-living objects, but also to other living individuals of its own genus. What is generic persists as self-identical through a number of these individuals.²²

Once again we have some "contradictions;" for the individual embodies the genus, yet at the same time the genus is not identical with the individual. Similarly, several individuals share a common genus, but the genus does not exist on its own apart from those particular individuals. These contradictions need to be resolved.

For all that several individuals share the same genus, they are not thereby identical. Each is a centered singular that resists others even as it seeks to appropriate them. The differences that particularize them, making them contraries within the generic category, can only be thought as kinds or genders. (Because we are still developing a logical derivation we cannot jump to contingent and idiosyncratic natural bodies.)²³

Objective reality as so described presents us with a set of centered individuals. The genus that they share, however, has no reality. It is simply a concept, lacking objectivity. It can find expression only where the differences that distinguish two or more individuals are canceled.²⁴ Yet any expression of life must be centered. There is, then, a drive toward an integrated being that embodies the genus that two (or more) individuals share. This conceived need is only a seed. Were it to be fully developed, however, it only becomes another living individual which, when the logic of its own structure is worked out, turns out to be distinct from the genus, so we would then need to retrace once again the sequence already

developed. We would face the same dilemma concerning the reality of the genus, looking for another seed for its solution, and so on, in an ongoing, infinite regress.²⁵

Next comes a logical move that is peculiarly Hegelian. Up until now we have explored all the angles of the idea of life as it becomes more sophisticated and intricate; whenever contradictions emerged we relativized them by taking the two sides as the beginning and end of a process of becoming. Now we have a different kind of challenge; for we have a process that produces an eternal recurrence of the same.

At this point Hegel steps back and looks at the overall pattern of this recurring process: the realization of the genus from two individuals produces a new living individual which, as not yet a complete embodiment of the genus, must reproduce itself in turn. This repetitive dynamic of propagation is genuinely universal and all encompassing. In fact it is just this infinite process that fully realizes life as genus. Through it the *concept* of genus and its *reality* – subjectivity and objectivity – are one. The conceptual universal of genuine life is continually referred to the objective universal of reproduction, which finds its justification in that original generic concept.²⁶

So the full analysis of genus leads to this cycle in which the concept of life as genus (or universal) relates to an objective repeating (or universal) cycle as its realization. We can say that a subjective concept is here continuing to achieve its realization in an objective universality. Expressed in that abstract form – “a concept searching for its full expression in objectivity” – we have in embryo the definition of knowledge or cognition. With that realization, Hegel has executed the shift to his next logical category.²⁷

This, in sum, is how the logic of “life” develops. While it is tempting to refer each term to phenomenal instances – biological individuals interacting with a geological environment and reproducing themselves through sexual intercourse – none of that concrete detail is necessary for the systematic progression. I have described each move as motivated by a conceptual requirement. One analyzes a concept to identify its components. Each of those components is analyzed in turn; and the results of that analysis are brought together to see what that entails for the original concept. At times the analysis leads to two opposing statements, both of which are necessary to capture what is involved. Taking such “contradictions” seriously forces thought to explore the process that enables both contraries to apply to the same thing. In sum, a logical derivation uses analysis and explication, and balances that with synthesis and resolution.

The trickiest logical move occurs at the end, where Hegel jumps from “living genus” to “cognition.” A similar shift occurs in the move from “teleology” to “life.” While we have discussed this kind of move before, it deserves scrutiny again, not only because it is critical to making the logic systematic, but also because we shall be focusing on a related kind of move within the philosophy of nature. What happens when Hegel’s logic first introduces the terms ‘life’ or ‘cognition?’

In the first place, Hegel adopts the synthetic mode. He reflects on the total dynamic of a fully realized teleology, or of a fully realized genus. What he finds is an ongoing, recurrent process, one which moves from conceived intention to realized end and back to conceived intention, or from unrealized genus to seed to new individual and back to unrealized genus.²⁸ He then analyzes this infinite process to determine its structure, its recurrent moments. Concept and objective realization mutually imply each other and so make up a single unified structure of meaning (thereby the concept ‘life’ emerges from that of ‘teleology’); genus as principle and reproductive propagation are two sides of the same universal, one subjective and the other objective (and thus ‘cognition’ is derived from ‘life’). That basic description considered as a simple, single conceptual unit has been matched to a term, derived from conventional language, that captures in principle what is involved.²⁹

Similar moves from definition to definiendum occur in less elevated contexts. We have seen it, for example, in the introduction of the terms ‘reproduction’ and ‘genus.’ At the critical transitions where we move to a completely new set of terms, however, it is harder to recognize, because we must there dissociate the strict logical description from the context in which it has emerged and recognize how the pure meanings allow for a new category, whose name is conventionally used in quite a different context. These moves are difficult; but Hegel requires them to make his logic, as well as his philosophy of the real world, genuinely systematic.

Using Hegel’s logical analysis of ‘life’ as a template we can now measure the discussion of geological, vegetable and animal nature in his *Philosophy of Nature* to see to what extent they follow the logical derivation and where they diverge.

Biology or organic physics

We start with a quick review of the logic of ‘life.’ It starts by analyzing the structure (or Gestalt) of life, in which a living individual reproduces itself through the interaction of its constituent members or parts. This leads to a consideration of the living process where an individual assimilates its

environment. Finally, a plurality of individuals together constitute a genus or universal, embodying some key dynamic quality or character they all share. Structure, Assimilation and Genus are the three key moments of the analysis.

In the *Philosophy of Nature* it is only in the section on the animal organism that Hegel exploits this threefold pattern to the full.³⁰ Sensibility, irritability and reproduction not only define the basic structure of animals, but are elaborated into three systems, the first two of which are again divided along the same threefold lines.³¹ Feeling, drives and appropriation are moments in animal assimilation. Species and genders as well as the finitude of the individual play a role in the discussion of zoological genus.

But Hegel gets to this elaborate instantiation of the logic by way of geological and botanical phenomena. Whereas formation, assimilation and genus could be mapped onto the three moments of "Vegetable Nature," they do so in very general ways.³² On the other hand, "Geological Nature" is organized along quite abstract lines: universal structure, particular differentiation and moments of singularity – a pattern derived from the logic of conceiving and requiring no reference to the logic of 'life.'

At each stage, then, Hegel organizes the data of experience according to schemata developed in the *Logic*. Yet it soon becomes apparent that the logic does not generate the sequential pattern from stage to stage. For, unlike the logic, subjectivity comes at the end of the analysis, adumbrated in plants, articulated in animals, and coming to full expression only with the transition to spirit. Instead of having the concept or subjective moment initiate and drive the systematic argument (as happens in the *Logic*), the philosophy of nature moves toward it as a telos or end.

To be sure, Hegel introduces his discussion of the mineral realm by opposing subjective life to the totality of non-living nature as its immediate presupposition (§338); he thus recalls the logical shift already discussed from living individual to assimilation process. Yet this comment cannot be justified systematically from anything that has preceded in the *Philosophy of Nature*, where we look in vain for any evidence of subjective life within the discussions of physics and chemistry. If he were to rely on this comment to derive geological nature as the first stage of organic physics he would either beg the question by presupposing what he wants to establish, or manipulate the argument by arbitrarily choosing the logical device he needs to accomplish his purpose. While logical analyses are used to justify how Hegel organizes each stage of organic

physics, then, they cannot explain in any satisfactory way why each stage emerges systematically from the one before.

Nor can they predict the detailed articulation of those subsidiary moments: what actually is particular about the geological realm, how plants assimilate their environment, what sensitive, irritable and reproductive systems animal bodies actually have. Even though Hegel frequently uses logical terms to characterize these natural phenomena, the descriptions cannot themselves be derived from any preceding moment.

In his lectures he expanded on this text by referring to the discoveries and conclusions of the science of his day. The granite and calciferous principle; root, leaf, wood, bark and bud; bones, nerves, muscles, blood and heart; all involve empirical references to the observations and analyses of geologists and biologists. This suggests that the published paragraphs being commented on are an analytic and abstract description derived from the disciplined observation of nature. The logical schema has suggested what kind of thing to look for; nature fills in that schema with the particular, logically contingent, empirical reality that corresponds to the general description.

Two differences, then, pinpoint the distinctiveness of the *Philosophy of Nature*. First is the inversion of subjectivity's place from the beginning to the end. Second is the way in which empirical details are used to flesh out logical structures once they are identified. These two converge on one fundamental question. How is it decided which logical structure is appropriate at each stage? Since the development from stage to stage does not mimic the logic, that transition must somehow be generated from within the *Philosophy of Nature*. By exploring this question we can extend our understanding of how it is different from the *Science of Logic*.

In a systematic argument the critical decision about the appropriate framework for each stage depends on the way that stage has been derived from its predecessor. So we are driven to the key question: How does Hegel get from chemistry to geology, from geology to botany, from botany to zoology and from zoology to anthropology? And how do these moves compare to the comparable shift in the *Logic*?

When we look at §337, the initial paragraph in the discussion of "Organic Physics," we find that Hegel simply takes the logical triplicity of universal, particular and singular, and applies it in a formal manner to the conventional scientific division among mineral, vegetable and animal realms. This paragraph, however, comes after the key transition has already been made; for "Organism" was introduced in the final paragraph of "Chemical Process."³³ §337 presupposes that shift, reflecting on how the conceptual category just introduced is itself to be analyzed

into its component stages. This suggests that there are two aspects to each transition: first the generation of a new conceptual framework out of the earlier material (which comes at the end of any particular section); and second, a preliminary reflection on how the new stage is itself to be conceptually organized (which initiates the next section).

When we look at the first set of transitional paragraphs, those that conclude the sections on chemistry, geology, botany and zoology, we find that common to all (§336, §342, §349 and §376) is the German term *Begriff* ("concept").³⁴ Hegel is indicating that central to any systematic shift is the act of conceiving – of thinking and understanding – as distinct from observing and organizing given chemical, geological or biological phenomena. In the moment of transition, he is suggesting, thought reflects on the relevant phenomena that have been brought together in the previous discussion and conceives (or comprehends) them: they are integrated into a unified concept, where the moments are recognized as components of a single totality, and the totality defined by its moments.

We have seen this move before in the logical transition from life to cognition. Thought there considered the total dynamic, identified the recurrent structure of that dynamic, and then integrated that pattern into a single conceptual unit.

Recall that the same conceptual move occurs when Hegel moves from chemistry to geology:

Chemical processes have been shown to have a number of distinct characteristics: (1) any separation is also a combination, and vice versa; (2) there are processes of separation and combination that are totalities in that they start and end with the same kind of chemical body. Further, when we look at the total set of chemical processes, we discover (3) that we started from pure metals and ended up with the same metals; and (4) that any particular body, although endowed with the appearance of self-contained independence, is not in fact unmediated but is produced by one kind of process and absorbed and transformed in another. Therefore (5) the only thing that can be firmly individuated is the set of processes as a whole.³⁵

Conceptual thought brings together (or synthesizes) all these considerations drawn from the analytical description of experience into the single unified thought of an individual totality within which moments are both generated and pass over into other moments – an infinite, self-initiating and self-maintaining process. The name for that concept is 'organism.'³⁶

Since Hegel has already shown in §335 that chemical processes do not involve life in that the end of any one process does not itself initiate its complement or counterpart, he cannot assume any "self-mediating agency" (§338). So the initial organism to be investigated in nature is not something living, but has only the "shape" of an organism. In drawing this conclusion Hegel refers back to the second moment within the logic of life, where the living individual is set over against a presupposed context that conditions the whole process of assimilation. Lacking the full dynamic of life, the appropriate logical schema for a geological organism can only be taken (as we have seen) from the threefold structure of conceiving: universal, particular and singular.³⁷

When we turn to the transition from geology to botany in §342, thought brings together into a single concept the external, organized geological shape, the meteorological processes it undergoes and the transient points of subjectivity that, at the time, were thought to be generated spontaneously.³⁸ Were this identity of organism and subjectivity to exist, it would be the thought of a 'vivified organism' (Miller's translation), which as subjectivity would (in accordance with the logic of assimilation) distinguish itself from the geological realm while yet presupposing it as its material condition.³⁹

Hegel can now apply to the concept of organism the most basic categories of life, of an objectivity permeated with subjectivity. Because the evidence considered so far does not present individuals made up of self-centered members, the logical framework to be applied can be only preliminary and general: structure, assimilating process and genus. Yet the concept of organism, which also sets the framework for this section, tells us that this life will be composed of distinct and distinguishable parts. This is enough to justify Hegel's appeal in the first paragraph of "Vegetable Nature" to plants as the natural instantiation of the conceptual pattern thus developed.

Even though plants have only an unmediated subjectivity, several features emerge from their concrete phenomena which Hegel gathers together conceptually in §349. Reproduction through seeds describes a process where individuals go back into creating more individuals of the same type; and the various parts of the plant are transient moments mediated by other parts. They each perform distinct functions in the living process. By identifying the distinct individuality of each part and function and then thinking of all together as moments within the self-constituting living process, thought reaches the full concept of a 'living organism,' where each part is defined by its distinctive function. Such a concept reflects the logical analysis of the living individual. As we

have seen, it is animal nature that provides the instantiation of this new concept.⁴⁰

One can expect, then, a close similarity of structure between the logical description of the "living individual," and the organism as found in the animal realm, and this is worked out as Hegel proceeds. Nevertheless, from a systematic point of view, the concepts have been reached in quite different ways. In the *Logic*, as we have seen, the thought of members interacting in accordance with the subjective principle, concept or soul is derived simply from thinking through the implications of thoughts themselves. In the *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel has assembled the key empirical features of plants with all of their implications and then identified what would integrate them into a unity.⁴¹

We turn, finally, to the transition from the animal to the spiritual realm. Natural death overcomes the tension within the animal between its singularity and the genus it embodies; natural immediacy is cancelled. Yet what determines the organic life of the animal is its living subjectivity. By bringing together those two moments conceptually into the concept of a fully mediated living subjectivity which continues to reconstitute itself despite death, we have the basis for a new stage: "conceptual subjectivity, whose objectivity is itself the sublated immediacy of singularity, the concrete universal. As a result the concept is posited that has for its being its corresponding reality, namely, the concept." The name for this concept is spirit.⁴²

At the end of each of the discussions of chemical, geological, botanical and zoological nature, then, the systematic transition is not generated by the natural phenomena themselves. Rather, conceptual thought gathers together the phenomena that have been described, reflects on what is essential, considers them as a totality, and then integrates them into a new unified concept. That concept provides the schema for the philosopher to use in the next stage: looking to nature to see how that schema is in fact instantiated.

This move applies, with respect to empirical nature, the same kind of logical maneuver that Hegel has used in shifting from 'teleology' to 'life' and from 'life' to 'cognition' in the *Logic*. In both disciplines philosophical thought reflects on the total dynamic that has been described, identifies its structure and its recurring moments, and then unites them into a simple, single conceptual unit. That new concept is then matched to a term, either from the *Logic* or from conventional language, that captures in principle what is involved.

The *Philosophy of Nature* is distinguished from the *Logic* in that the moments to be integrated conceptually are not themselves the product of

a strictly logical derivation. Rather, they are observed empirical phenomena, analytically described in the basic text, and fleshed out in Hegel's Remarks and lectures – phenomena that fit the conceptual framework established for that stage, together with its subordinate moments. The phenomena exemplify much more than what the logical schema requires; each moment has its own agenda and produces its own results. This “more” is to be included when conceptual thought prepares for the next systematic move.

So Hegel does not simply draw real physical rabbits out of the metaphysical hat of ‘life.’ Logic and metaphysics provide the basic conceptual framework for investigating nature. But philosophy must turn to nature itself to discover how that conceptual schema acquires flesh and blood. Thought assists in defining what is essential and what is peripheral in that data, but it knows that the essential will be related to empirical processes and their actual results. Those contingent processes together with their results must be taken into account when determining the next concept to be investigated.

10

Cognition and Psychology

The real world includes more than nature.¹ In the realm of spirit self-conscious, living beings take account of their world, including the prospect of their own demise, and incorporate that into the dynamic of their existence. So Hegel completes his system by developing a *Philosophy of Spirit*. Here again we can ask how systematic structure allows for, and incorporates, contingency.

We shall follow a pattern similar to the one we took in the previous two chapters. For, in the introduction to his logical chapter on “The Idea of Cognition,” Hegel mentions his anthropology, phenomenology and psychology, the first three sections of his *Philosophy of Spirit*, and goes on to say: “The *Idea of spirit* as the subject matter of *logic* already stands within pure science; it has not therefore to watch spirit progressing through its entanglement with nature, with immediate determinateness and material things, or with representation; this is dealt with in the three sciences mentioned above.”² In other words, spirit is discussed both in the chapter on cognition and in the later anthropological and psychological discussions; but in the former we have pure science, and in the latter some form of observation (“watching spirit progressing”) – taking account of the way spirit contingently emerges in the real world.

The observation of spirit’s actual progress is to “embrace what is the subject matter of ordinary *empirical psychology*,” but in order to be a “science” it “must not go empirically to work, but be scientifically conceived.”³ Hegel contrasts his approach with the contingency of contemporary psychology in §378 of the *Encyclopaedia*:

Empirical psychology has concrete spirit for its object, and because, with the renaissance of science, observation and experience have become the primary foundation for the cognition of the concrete, it has been

practiced in the same way. As a result, on the one hand metaphysics [rational psychology] was retained outside of this empirical science and came to no concrete determination and content on its own; on the other hand empirical science concentrated its attention on the usual metaphysics of the understanding with its forces, diverse faculties and so on, and ostracized any speculative considerations.⁴

"Speculative considerations," which grasp "the unity of the determinations in their opposition,"⁵ will, by contrast, result in a "scientific" handling of the philosophy of spirit.

So we have three disciplines which investigate spirit. *Empirical psychology* is distinguished from the *philosophy of spirit* in that it subordinates its observations and experiences to the abstract categories of force and spiritual capacities in an almost mechanical way, while the latter grasps the unity of the faculties in their diversity. The *logic of cognition* like the philosophy of spirit is scientific and speculative; the former, however, lies within the pure science of self-thinking thought, while the latter is concerned with the way spirit is conditioned by nature (anthropology), with its emergence as consciousness and self-consciousness (phenomenology) and with the developing mastery of its own content in representation and thought (psychology). We can throw light on Hegel's systematic contingency by examining how these three different approaches – the purely empirical, the purely logical and the speculative grasping of experience – are related to each other.

As in the previous two chapters, we shall move from a short textual exposition – of the chapter on cognition – to deciphering the distinctive role of the philosophy of spirit; only then shall we compare the speculative character of the doctrine of spirit with contemporary empirical psychology.

The idea of cognition

Once in his lectures on §381 of the *Philosophy of Spirit* Hegel recalled the logical transition from life to the idea of cognition in his *Science of Logic*: "The death of the simply immediate, singular life is the *proceeding forth of spirit*."⁶

This "proceeding forth," [says Hegel] is not to be understood corporeally but spiritually – not as a natural progression, but as the development of the concept, which sublates the onesidedness of the genus, unable [as it is] to come to an adequate actualization but rather

through death showing itself as negative power over against that living actuality, as well as the opposing onesidedness of animal being, constrained in its singularity – sublating both of these into a singularity, universal in and of itself, or (which is the same thing) into that universal, existing on its own in a universal way, which is spirit.⁷

That is to say, at the end of the *logic* of “life,” the universality of the genus remains a subjective concept, whose actualization only finds expression in the death of each finite, living individual and in the reproduction of the species by way of the combined seed of two such beings. There is thus a discrepancy between the simple conceptual universality of the genus, and its actuality as an infinite progression of individuals each of whom passes away; the concept and its realized objectification do not match. The logical idea which was to be the union of concept and objectivity has fallen apart into a disparity that needs to be overcome. We have a situation where “concept and object are supposed to, but do not yet, correspond to each other” – a proposition that regularly serves as a definition for “cognition.” In other words, the concept “cognition” names the drive to overcome the discrepancy between concept and reality.

Governed by the “idea of the true,” conceptual thought distinguishes itself from its object and at the same time seeks to find a concept that is appropriate to this other. This quest develops through various stages.

At first, thought seeks to grasp the object as it is in itself, carefully avoiding the introduction of any mediating activity. Because we are to initiate no conceptual distinctions, we are to consider on its own, as a universal abstracted from its context, not only the object in general, but also all those concrete properties that distinguish it from others. In this way thought analyses the given into its elements – producing a collection of diverse universals which, though derived from a single object, yet possess no conceptual connections with each other. Yet the object is really a whole of parts, a cause with effects. It contains within itself relationships which bind the various properties together. These also need to be identified if we are to satisfy the drive to truth. The object is not just a collection of analyzed and isolated properties, but rather a singular which determines itself in particular ways. So the desired correspondence cannot be reached through analysis. If we are to achieve the truth our conceiving must somehow mirror this objective synthesis.

The mediating activity of thought can be defined by its three conceptual determinations: universality, particularity and singularity. In the first synthetic move – definition – the object is taken first as a *singular* so that it can then be subsumed by thought under a *universal* genus and

then distinguished from others through its *particularities*. Although this approach may be productive for terms constructed by reason (such as those of mathematics) it becomes problematic when thinking attempts to identify the determining features of any other kind of object. For what specifically distinguishes men from other animals (for example, earlobes) could be quite inessential, and the universal genus could be identified with any common characteristic, whether contingent or necessary. So by allowing for totally arbitrary applications, the rules for definition fail to achieve the desired correspondence.

If the approach starting with the object as singular cannot reach its goal, then perhaps we should start with it as a universal, going on to determine its particular components through division. As the second strategy of synthesis, division needs to be exhaustive in grasping all the diverse determinations of the object as a whole. Like definition, this initiative can be productive with regard to the abstract constructions of conceptual systems; but it is regrettably ineffective when one turns to other objects. After all, while we might realize that something is a hippopotamus, that general description tells us nothing about why it has the particular bone formation and teeth structure that it has. The conceived universal can capture what is common to the diverse members of the organism, but it lacks a principle to determine what is essential among the characteristics it has.

The ineffectiveness of both definition and division can be overcome were thought to construct a theorem which sets out expressly the basis of the reciprocity between the universal and its particulars. But even though hypotheses and theories can suggest possible relations between the diverse determinations of an object, they yet lack a complete correspondence. For it is our subjective conceiving that has constructed these connections; there is no guarantee that the object is in fact structured in the way proposed by thought. A carefully structured hypothesis that explains all known facts need not be true, as the Ptolemaic astronomers belatedly discovered.

On its own, then, the idea of the true cannot accomplish its goal of getting a concept to correspond to its object. Once we look back over this whole fruitless attempt, however, we notice that in every case we started with the object as given and looked for a way of making our concepts match. One could, however, take the opposite tack and try to construct another object identical with our concepts. So, in place of the "idea of the true," we turn to the "idea of the good."

The hope that this idea will achieve complete correspondence of concept with reality remains, however, equally unrealizable. For the

objective world has its own contingent structure and program; unaware of what the real is actually like, the practical idea encounters insuperable limits, which defeat its purposes. As long as the practical idea of the good is separated from the theoretical idea of the true, it remains as ineffective as the latter whenever it is removed from self-conscious action. Each needs the other if a complete identification of concept with object is to be achieved. So the absolute idea – the idea “valid in all respects” – is “the identity of the theoretical and the practical, each one of which *on its own* is yet one-sided, having the idea only as a desired beyond and unattained goal, each, therefore, a synthesis of striving, having as well as not having the ideal within itself, shifting from one over to the other, yet never bringing both thoughts together; rather leaving them in their contradiction.”⁸ We have moved on to the chapter on absolute idea.

Within this sketch of the logical chapter on “The Idea of Cognition” we can recognize once again the elements of Hegel’s systematic approach, with its three stages.

To articulate the essential features of any thought, we begin, first, with an analysis of the original concept: we want to understand what it means. When this task is thoroughly carried out, we find that we have lost the original sense of the concept – and reached its antithesis. This transition of thought into an opposite Hegel calls dialectic. So, in this case, analysis, definition, division, theory and the idea of the good all fail in their projects when we consider what their full application would involve.

Second, however, thought reflects on each of these dialectical transitions as a whole, including its starting point and its results. It identifies the presuppositions that generated the move to an opposite and proposes that the unfortunate result can be avoided by adopting a contrary approach. Instead of analysis, synthesis; instead of starting from the singularity of the object, beginning from its universality; instead of making the concept correspond to the object, making the object correspond to the concept. This is the first, speculative, answer to dialectical contradiction.

There is, however, a second speculative move. A theorem unites in one concept the two one-sided moments of definition and division; in a theoretical explanation thought starts as much from the singularity of the object as from its universality. Similarly the absolute idea brings together two one-sided moments: the theoretical and the practical idea. The theoretical concern to get our concepts right needs to be balanced by the practical interest in realizing our ideas; and vice versa. This reciprocity has a positive sense, for each one reinforces and requires the other within a self-contained equilibrium. In this new unity each side’s self-centered focus becomes completely transparent to the other, and the

whole pattern becomes a new thought which can be understood in its determinate simplicity or simple determinacy.

This integration of two partialities into a more comprehensive concept is not merely a speculative synthesis. It creates a unity which can now be considered on its own, apart from the mediation with produced it. We have a new immediate concept. The understanding takes up the conceptual determinations of the newly integrated thought and fixes them by abstracting from all those mediating processes of thought that led to it. It thereby sets the stage for starting the whole process over again. By completing the circle it ensures a systematic development.

Psychology

These three stages of dialectical, speculative and understanding reason make up the three sides of logical form⁹ and, according to Hegel, the foundation of the systematic sciences. We can now ask how the *Philosophy of Spirit* takes over this pure logical form, and incorporates it into its consideration of observed data, so that the study of human nature does not remain merely empirical but becomes genuinely scientific. To focus our examination we shall concentrate on Hegel's "Psychology."¹⁰

The division of Hegel's "Psychology" into theoretical and practical spirit reminds us of the logical distinction between the idea of the true and the idea of the good. The same relationship between the theoretical and the practical occurs as well in the "Anthropology" and "Phenomenology": the natural soul is immediately determined by its surrounding nature, the feeling soul by its own nature; consciousness comes to terms with the object, self-consciousness takes the object up into itself. At the end of the "Phenomenology" (and so at the beginning of the "Psychology") there emerges an integration "of the subjectivity of the concept and its objectivity and universality" – of consciousness and its object – an integration that is reason: "self-consciousness as the certainty that its determinations are just as much, objectively, determinations of the essence of the thing as its own thoughts." Thus the activities of spirit, which are to be the theme of the "Psychology," are not determined by external conditions but relate "only to its own determinations," which are understood as at once determinations of the self and of the object. Only later, in the science of objective spirit, do we become involved with genuine reciprocity between intelligence and will on the one hand and the surrounding world on the other.

As a result, when the logical analysis of cognition is applied to the spiritual world matters become more complicated. Conceiving's relation to the

objective can be (1) naturally determined, (2) conditioned by the opposition between consciousness and object, (3) self-determining and (4) actualized in the world. What makes each of these different from the others is not derived from the logic, but follows from the stages through which spirit comes to be in the real world – starting with its inherence in nature and moving through its conscious separation from it, to its self-conscious identification with it, and beyond to its ventures into worldly action.

A detailed analysis of Hegel's "Psychology" provides further parallels between logic and the theory of spirit. In intuition, where attention turns directly to the content of immediate feeling, it works *analytically*, isolating that content into its own space and time. Representation, in contrast, works *synthetically*, at first as the connection of a recalled image with an intuition, then as the various couplings of imagination in association, fantasy and sign, and finally as the unity of name and sense in memory. Like the theorem, thinking is to reconstitute conceptually (that is, through judgments and syllogisms) the concrete relations that tie together the recalled content.

Then in practical spirit the will seeks to provide its immediate practical feeling with objectivity, at first as drive and caprice, then as the totality of general satisfaction in happiness, and in the end as incorporating the thinking of intelligence in genuine freedom.

Thus we discover an isomorphism between the logical idea of cognition and the psychology. But we can extend the agreement between the *Logic* and the *Philosophy of Spirit* even further. For the scientific nature of psychology lies in its detailed development:

- The immediate self-determination of spirit bifurcates into the opposition of attention and content, only to be reunited in intuition.
- The intuited image, divorced from its immediate place and time is retained subconsciously in the intellect until it is recalled by a new intuition, and what comes from this negative "nightly abyss" is bound together with what is positively given.
- As the intellect progressively masters this synthetic activity, it proceeds from the simple reproduction of contingent representations to free symbolic, allegorizing or poetic syntheses, before identifying these synthetic connections with an arbitrarily chosen sign. In each of these various types of imagination we can recognize the division into simple, contrary and integrating stages which mirror a "scientific" development.
- By retaining names, by reproducing the connection between name and sign without any intuition or image and finally by reciting

mechanically, memory integrates word and substance so that one can use names without reference to a distinct meaning. In this way the distinction between the subjective activity of representing and its recalled content is overcome at a higher level.

- We proceed to thought, where we once again progress from simple conceiving through bifurcating and explanatory judgments to integrating inferences which both determine the content and overcome the differences of form.
- The same scientific development of simple beginning, transition into another, reflective bringing together and conceptual integration can be found in the section on practical spirit. Simple practical feeling is dispersed into diverse drives and arbitrary choices, to be ultimately brought together in happiness.
- The last section, free spirit, in its turn, integrates the theoretical spirit of the intellect with the practical spirit of will.

In other words, Hegel's psychology proceeds "scientifically" because simple beginnings pass over into opposed elements which are then brought together in a synthesis and finally integrated into a unity. The *Philosophy of Spirit* and the *Logic* share the same theoretical structure.

Nonetheless there are significant differences. Several of Hegel's remarks on the relationship between his theory of spirit and empirical psychology can suggest what differentiates the *Philosophy of Spirit*. In the Remark to *Enc. §444* he writes that the empirical psychology of the Kantian philosophy (presumably he was thinking of Reinhold),

consists in nothing other than grasping and ordering the *facts* of human *consciousness*, indeed as *facts* just as they are *given, empirically*. With this situating of psychology, in which is mingled forms derived from the standpoint of consciousness and anthropology, nothing in its condition has altered, except for adding, with respect to metaphysics and philosophy in general as well as for spirit as such, the complete surrender of any cognition of the necessity of *what is in and of itself*, the surrender of both *concept* and *truth*. (Hegel's emphasis)¹¹

Here the distinction between scientific and empirical psychology does not lie in the empirically given "facts of human consciousness," on which both are equally grounded, but in the cognition of the necessity of these facts – how they both conceptually and in reality are connected with each other. But this implies that, in contrast to the *Logic* with

which it shares conceptual necessity, the *Philosophy of Spirit* must take account of psychological facts.

This peculiarity of the *Philosophy of Spirit* is reaffirmed in the Remark to *Enc.* §442. Hegel here mentions Condillac's philosophy which worked through the developing stages of spirit not in a conceptual way but in an anthropological one "according to which the faculties and powers are considered as emerging into existence one after another." In contrast to the approach of Reinhold, this is concerned with

making the *manifold* modes of activity of spirit understandable through their *unity* and with showing an interconnection of necessity. Only the categories used thereby are in general of a miserable type. The ruling determination is primarily that the sensible, correctly to be sure, be taken as primary, as the initiating foundation, but from this starting-point the further determinations appear to proceed in only an *affirmative* way, and the *negative* activity of spirit, whereby that material is spiritualized and overcome as sensible, is mistaken and overlooked. The sensible in that approach is not simply the empirically primary, but remains so, as if to become the genuine substantial foundation.¹²

Once again Hegel is stressing the systematic character of his psychology – the way a multitude is integrated into a unity. The various stages are, as we have seen, ordered according to conceptual requirements. His difference from Condillac lies simply in the significant role of the negative – of the dialectical transition into an opposite. Both of them presuppose the sensible: the empirically given must, "*correctly to be sure*, be taken as primary, as the initiating foundation" (my emphasis).

In other words, *any* theory of spirit must take the sensible seriously. For all that negativity is crucial, the various stages do not emerge as a result of strictly logical considerations, following from nothing other than the conceptual requirements of whatever precedes. Empirical content is to be integrated with the conceptual framework. Hegel is suggesting that thought must reflect on what is given in experience – the sensible – and, using its negative resources, carefully distinguish the anthropological from the phenomenological and the psychological. Because the logic has demonstrated the significance of the negative, thought will be able to recognize how each stage differs from the others, and all the data can be organized into a schema of affirmative, negative and synthesizing stages. Thus conceiving becomes a critical faculty of judgment, which distinguishes the simple from the complex, identifies the negative of every affirmative, and correctly recognizes those activities

that integrate the opposing moments. In the *Philosophy of Spirit* this faculty is being used to understand the sensible givens of experience.

Using a scientific approach to its subject matter, with its appreciation of the negative, enables thought, when looking for a starting point, to isolate within our psychological activities the *immediate* formless feeling that enables intuition to emerge only through the *negative* discrimination of attention from its content. Then another *negative* moment appears, for an intuition, now taken up into the intellect, disappears into the "night-like pit" of the subconscious, where it is not immediately noticed, yet must be presupposed if we are to explain how a representation involves recollection. The resulting representations, *negatively* detached from any immediate intuition, ground the first unmotivated associations of reproductive imagination, which in turn can be subjected to the *negative* attention of the intellect and thereby freely connected to each other in fantasy. The negative dynamic reaches its zenith when these general connections are referred to an arbitrarily chosen sign. By seeing how negations produce new positives, then, the critical judgment of conceptual thinking organizes the diverse empirical forms of intuition into a hierarchy.

In a similar way the negativity of conceiving recognizes that the empirical phenomena of mechanical memory makes possible the critical transition from a simple association of sign with meaning to the freedom of pure thinking; and again, how practical feeling must dissolve itself into sensibly experienced drives and caprice before the will can integrate the conflicting drives into the ultimate goal of happiness. While the content of this development does not emerge from a priori thought but from "the sensible," the organization comes from the logic.

In Hegel's *Logic*, thinking simply analyzes the inherent determinations of a concept in developing a scientific progression. In contrast, one finds in his "Psychology" names and labels that can come only from empirical psychology: attention, intuition, image, association, fantasy, intuition, recollection, memory, thinking, drive, caprice and happiness. These names refer to activities which one can isolate only through careful observation of our human spiritual life. They are not names for some structure of pure meanings: for a dialectical transition, for a speculative reflection or for a conceptual understanding. The philosophy of the real world, then, takes up contingent, empirical data of our intellectual activities in order to organize them within a scientific structure. It is distinguished from empirical psychology in that the latter collects observations without any clear understanding of its own reflective presuppositions, simply adding one feature to another, looking for positive similarities and generalities. The danger is that anthropological, phenomenological and

psychological data will become confused together. If the various phenomena are not isolated on the basis of a rational understanding of how elements are related, and the significance of their difference from each other is not taken seriously, psychological reflection will overlook the necessity which binds all these contingent givens into a coherent unity.

It is this central role of the negative that distinguishes the *Philosophy of Spirit* from the *Philosophy of Nature*. In the latter, observation notices different kinds of phenomena, and it is philosophical reflection that *holds* the diverse chemical processes (for example) *together* in a conceptual unity at the point where thought constructs a new elementary scientific starting point – the non-living organism. Since each natural stage does not change of its own into the next, development takes place “in the inner idea which constitutes the ground of nature.”¹³ Spirit, however, is already a living unity which maintains itself by continually articulating itself into independent faculties, powers and activities and reintegrating them into its life. In other words, the movement from simplicity through negation to integration is found within spiritual life itself. Because this dynamic unity of spiritual life is presupposed, philosophical reason does not need to integrate natural diversity as in the *Philosophy of Nature*. Rather, using negation, thought must differentiate carefully how the various isolated spiritual activities find their respective places within that whole. Philosophy’s role now lies in the negativity of analytical discrimination more than in synthetic integration. This is why we find that the conceptual pattern returns in diverse ways, for reason has discriminated between more complex and simpler activities, and has thus identified the particular way each stage develops within that common structure.

We can now summarize the argument of the last three chapters: how does the *Logic’s* claim to completeness relate to the philosophy of the real world? On the most basic level they share the same systematic structure. They go over from an original simplicity to some relationship of contraries, to then reach not only a synthesis of opposites, but also a new immediate concept that takes up the reciprocal synthesis into a unity. They differ, however, in the way this structure is articulated. Within the logic an analytical thinking leads from the original category into its contrary; and then a second analysis leads this other back to the original concept. This reciprocity, which at first leads into an infinite regress, becomes the basis for a conceptual unity which can thereby be abstracted from its mediating conditions. Within the *Philosophy of Nature* and the *Philosophy of Spirit*, thought discerns this pattern within empirical phenomena.

This agreement extends beyond the most general structure of scientific method. For pure thought recognizes specific patterns – mechanical,

chemical, organic and cognitive – which follow from the internal significance of its own concepts. And these conceptual structures provide templates for understanding the diversity of the real world.

In the philosophy of the real world, however, the development is no longer immanent within thought, as it is in the logic, but must account for the results of careful observation. When thinking through the philosophy of chemical nature, for example, we can anticipate logically that bodies oriented toward each other will generate chemical processes, and that these processes will mirror the three syllogistic forms of particular, singular and universal mediation. We can, however, predict neither what will be the most critical chemical elements nor the specific effects of the different processes nor the appearance of a fourth kind of process in elective affinity. Only after we have taken account of these experiences can philosophy integrate them with its conceptual presuppositions. And thought can bring these surprising and contingent results together into a new categorical unity which provides a new template for investigation.

Within the theory of spirit, philosophy isolates the simplest and most immediate types of spiritual activity as they have emerged from the previous analysis. In this way psychology starts from the most immediate self-determining acts of an intellect that has overcome the division between consciousness and object – that has moved beyond mere phenomenology. Thereafter it separates out and identifies those positive aspects and their negative presuppositions that can be distinguished within that starting point. These then explain the explicitly integrating activity that we have found in human life. Each emerging unity has its own simple character, and in its turn passes over into its negative counterpart, even though the specific nature of that negativity can be discovered only with reference to the real world. At each stage thinking identifies and separates out a new function which genuinely fulfils the expectations that thought entertains.

While the *Philosophy of Nature* is concerned with a contingent and dispersed otherness, then, the *Philosophy of Spirit* investigates an entity that overreaches nature and so incipiently embodies the systematic cohesion of reason.

Although the method of logical thinking offers the appropriate form for constructing the philosophy of the real world, any content comes from the logically contingent world of actual experience, which is quite other than pure thinking. It is this integration of logical thinking with experience which provides the advantage of both the *Philosophy of Nature* and the *Philosophy of Spirit* over the empirical sciences. For they not only distinguish and isolate each particular type of phenomena from the others, but also integrate them into their proper context within that unity which is our human life in the world.

11

Teleology and History

There is no phrase more characteristic of Hegel's philosophy of history than "the cunning of reason."¹ It suggests that there is some kind of overarching purpose governing history – a universal idea that exploits the passions and actions of finite humans to accomplish its ends.

Yet, as we have seen,² history is bedevilled with contingency. Events are triggered by passions, erupting at the slightest provocation. Actions combine with incidental circumstances to produce effects far removed from what was intended. In this confusing interplay of particular interests and singular decisions, it is highly unlikely that we can discern any kind of providential purpose that can take all these accidental events with their outcomes and weave them into a tapestry of rational necessity.

When we ask what Hegel has in mind when making such a claim, we are led to the theory of final causes. For in his chapter on "Teleology" in the larger *Logic* Hegel introduces the term "cunning" to suggest the deliberate way reason uses strange and unexpected means to achieve its ends. Reason is cunning not only in history but whenever a subjective purpose introduces an intermediate action or instrument to bring about a transformation in the objective world. He captures the essence of this relationship in the final sentence of §209 in the *Encyclopaedia*: "As the power inherent in those processes by which the objective wears itself down by mutual friction and dissolves itself, the subjective end nonetheless keeps itself *outside of them* and is that which *maintains itself* in them; this is what we mean by the *cunning* of reason."³

To understand how contingency functions in history, then, we are led directly into the logic of final causes. What does it really mean to talk of teleology, of means and ends? Hegel's analysis is subtle and sophisticated. For our purposes we shall only provide an outline.

Teleology

The first thing to notice is that a final cause, as cause, is other than what is caused. It is conceptual, an organized structure of reason – what we might call subjective – whereas its effect is to be objective, something that takes place in reality. This discrepancy means that final causes never are fully self-determining. They have to take account of that which is alien, even if their ultimate goal is to dissolve that barrier. Limited by this separation from the objective world, they are inevitably finite.⁴

The second thing to notice, however, is that any subjective final cause is necessarily directed toward this objective world. For it is not only something conceptual and general, but also intentional and dynamic, spelling out in some detail the way that objective realm is to be determined. This need to render its content determinate – its specific intention – presupposes that the objective world is not yet determined in that way. In other words, the final cause distinguishes its goal from the reality in which that goal is to be realized. It defines its own status as something existing outside of the objective world, while yet necessarily seeking to establish a connection with it.

There is, then, an inherent tension between the content of any subjective goal and its form. Its content involves determining objectivity; formally, however, the goal as subjective lies outside that objectivity. This tension needs to be mediated, since it is a tension within the single meaning of the concept “purpose” or “end as such.” Any logical structure of mediation involves an inference or syllogism.

To resolve the contrast between content and form, thought first makes it explicit, transforming it from being an implicit tension into an explicit exclusion of one from the other. The subjective goal recognizes that it is working with something radically alien, and thereby makes its internal conflict public. At the same time, the goal defines itself as needing to surrender its content to pure objectivity, this alien other.⁵

The subjective intention is only the first moment in any complete analysis of final cause. For the resolve to both exclude oneself from, and disclose oneself in, objectivity initiates a move toward the fully realized goal. Were that resolve not finite, not limited by an external world, the move would be sufficient of itself to accomplish its purposes. Since, however, its subjectivity must come to terms with an alien objectivity that is excluded from it, it uses what lies immediately at hand as an instrument or *means* for accomplishing that end. There is nothing special about the means it chooses to use. Any number of instruments are

available for performing the task. A particular object becomes the means simply because it is both useful and available.

What we have is a syllogism in which the means used serves as the mediating or middle term. The subjective intention appropriates or subsumes the instrument: that is the minor premise. The instrument in turn is to lead to, and overreach, the objective world, transforming it until it conforms to the overarching goal: that is the major premise. The means, however, lies outside of both the subjective intention and the realized goal. It is something purely mechanical. The connection that holds this syllogism together, then, is not found in the means but stems from the subjective goal or intention. While, on the one hand, the means is thus incorporated into the reflective perspective of the end proposed subjectively, it also, on the other, gives to that end an immediate, if incomplete, objectivity, and starts the metamorphosis into achieved reality. So the means of accomplishing an end is not simply an objective entity, an instrument; it is just as much an activity – a dynamic that changes things.

Nonetheless the means is unstable. Implicitly it unites subjective intention and its realization, but the goal has not yet been fully achieved. As an instrument the means initiates natural processes, mechanical and chemical, that are supposed to lead on to the fully achieved end. In themselves, these processes are blind and simply follow their own necessity. It is the cunning of reason that uses the blind necessity of nature for its own ends, and thereby accomplishes its purposes.

We have, then, subjective aim, instrument and realized goal. They can be united in a single perspective because the content remains the same throughout. Whether pure intention, utilized means or final achievement, it is a single conceptual organization of parts into a whole that determines what each one will be. To be sure, significant differences remain. The content starts as simply a concept; it becomes the governing principle that uses instruments; and in the end it is objectively realized. But the whole pattern can be called a final *cause* only because the conceptual content remains consistent throughout.

In Hegel's analysis, however, this leads to a paradoxical implication. For it means that in our objective world we never do come to a final end. Each stage reached is itself transient and leads over to something else. Each end becomes in turn a means to another end ... and the process continues on to infinity.

It is the external connection between the subjective end and its realization that has produced this infinite progress; this is, indeed, the central core of what is meant by final cause. Once we acknowledge that fact, however, the whole perspective shifts. For now we can look at the infinite

cycle as a whole and identify its essential constituents. The concept that is the original intention requires an objectivity that starts out as alien so that it can then incorporate that otherness back into its own integrated framework. In other words its goal is to maintain itself by using the objective world; and to transform the objective world in such a way that its own internal processes maintain a conceptually coherent dynamic. That is to say, the whole causes its determinate division into parts, while the parts constitute and recreate the whole. It is what both Aristotle and Kant had taken to be the ultimate truth of teleology. But, says Hegel, it is misleading here to talk of final causes. For a cause is always distinct from its effect. In this interrelation of whole and parts, by contrast, the subjective concept is one with its objective realization; cause is the same as effect. The appropriate term to characterize this logical structure is not final cause or 'teleology,' but 'life.'⁶ And instead of calling this a concept, with its overtones of subjectivity, we can adopt the term 'Idea' – a term that can be used to describe a concept that is fully realized objectively.

History

I have spent some time sketching the logic of final causes or teleology to set the stage for my next task, which is to show how final causality functions in Hegel's philosophy of history. There are several points to be drawn from what we have done so far.

- (1) When we use the vocabulary of final cause we are talking about an understanding of the world in which the subjective intention is in some sense external to the realm of objectivity in which it is to be realized. It is precisely this internal dichotomy that traditionally made the teleological argument for the existence of a transcendent God so persuasive.

Nature is the realm of external relations – of space and time – in which independent things stand side by side. While history is the sphere of human action, which inevitably involves intentions and goals, it nonetheless takes place in time, and the individuals who act are not only natural beings, spatially distinct, but also centered consciousness isolates each one into his or her own subjectivity. It is precisely this feature of externality in both nature and history that makes the language of final cause so appropriate.

- (2) When we refer to final causes, we are talking of exploiting the processes inherent in the objective world for the purpose of some kind of conceptual end. On the one side are mechanical movements

and chemical combinations, instinctive desires and blind passion, on the other is some kind of direction that has a sense of a unified whole – a whole which can only be realized once it has been divided into distinctive, independent processes, even though that diversity is never allowed to become dispersed into an unorganized chaos; in the end all the diversity generated is to be reincorporated into the integrated unity originally intended. It is this complex that makes the phrase “cunning of reason” so appropriate for describing the teleological relation.

- (3) Kant’s use of the term ‘teleology’ to define the functioning of a living organism is misleading. In one sense its self-determining and self-maintaining activity is an example of an end successfully maintaining itself in the objective world. It marks the resolution of all the conceptual problems inherent in our ordinary sense of final cause. But if we are going to be precise in our use of language, organic wholes involve something quite distinct. For, as Kant himself saw, we have then to abandon the language of cause as ordered sequence altogether. We have instead a self-maintaining, reciprocal dynamic where it is inappropriate to isolate the cause as independent from its effect or end. The two are inextricably involved in a single interactive dynamic.

For Hegel, history falls outside of any self-maintaining process. Art, religion and philosophy all give evidence of spirit absolute – of spirit not relative to, or limited by, anything else. History, however, is the culminating stage of objective spirit, still bedevilled by externality, even if it incorporates the whole panorama of the world’s past. For that past is a potpourri of diversity that acquires significance only from the achieved stage of the present. The present and the future, however, are indeterminate, subject to change and transformation, prey to the spontaneous passions of men and women. On its own, then, history cannot interpret itself. It does not manifest unambiguously any concept that it is actualizing.

This would seem to condemn to failure any attempt to determine the final causes that govern history. For we, as philosophers, do not live outside of time. We share in its ambiguities. Even the way we think is conditioned by the world in which we live.

Hegel does not fall prey to this modern despair. For while we are situated in history, there are nonetheless aspects of our lives that open up a vista into the principles that govern the universe. Great art offers an all-encompassing vision; the aim of religious devotion and practice is to integrate us into the universe; and philosophy makes conceptually explicit the network of relations that constitute the way the world is organized.

Philosophy, with its reliance on reason and conceptual thought, alone makes the whole process self-conscious. So philosophers become the agents by which people situated in history can achieve self-knowledge. They tell us the nature of reason; and once we have acquired that insight we can recognize the cunning reason uses in the chaotic course of world history.

That claim is intentionally self-reflexive. Philosophers emerge in history, conditioned not only by all of the past, but also by the insights they have gained in art and the transcendence they have encountered in religion. When they discover the nature of reason they grasp the end that history is to achieve. This insight, that happens in time, identifies the final cause that governs the whole historical process.

It is no wonder that Hegel makes such a fuss about speculation and reflection. It is all a trick conjured up by mirrors, by specula. When the philosopher claims to know what history is all about, he is only looking at himself.

Let us first admit that Hegel is not the first one to translate his own image into the explanation of the world. What is Plato's *Republic* but the philosopher writ large? What is Hume's appeal to custom as the basis for our belief in cause but a sophisticated version of his Tory preferences? In a similar way, then, is Hegel situating his philosophy at the end of history not only because 1830 was the final point history had reached when he was lecturing, but also because his philosophy had uniquely captured the essence of everything that is, and will be?

Before we slide too easily into this Kojévian conclusion, we should look more closely. What, in particular, is Hegel's conception of the *telos* of history? How does he justify his claim that human passions are but instruments that must wear against each other to produce the end in view? For we may find that his answer is more subtle, and less easy to repudiate, than we at first imagine.

Let us go back to a passage from his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* cited in Chapter 1: "It is what we may call the *cunning of reason* that it sets the passions to work in its service, so that the agents by which it gives itself existence must pay the penalty and suffer loss."⁷

Passions are the instruments or means that reason uses to accomplish its ends. The universal idea, as the subjective final cause, maintains itself inviolate and unscathed in the background in exclusive isolation. The passions with their immediate interest in particular ends are sent into battle – and here, as we have seen, Hegel uses the critical term that recurs whenever he talks about the cunning of reason – "they wear each other out."⁸

Hegel here keeps reason well distanced from the passions, following the traditional conventions of philosophical wisdom. Reason is universal, the passions are particular; reason sits in its calm pavilion, while the passions struggle against each other in the pit. Where Hegel has diverged from the tradition is in suggesting that the passions are being used by reason. They are related as means to end. Reason as the subjective intention is immediately present in the passions as a governing principle. This is its initial move into objectivity. In other words, while reason is opposed to the passions as universal to particular, reason can nonetheless realize its universal intention only by abandoning itself to the particularity of the passions. The passions are the means by which reason's initial subjective end accomplishes its final purpose of making that end objective.

The achieving of the end, however, is not governed by reason. It follows the inherent development of the passions themselves. Each passion has its own particular focus; as passion it has the energy and drive to push toward its own satisfaction. Once satisfied, it comes to an end, an end, however, that is not primarily its goal (since passions are seldom so self-conscious as to have a specific intention), but its termination. So each passion is inherently finite. Indeed there are many such finite, particular interests and concerns, which conflict and struggle against each other. They wear each other down in a complex of quasi-mechanical and chemical processes.

Hegel's peculiar claim is that this mutual struggle of particulars itself brings to realization the universal that remains in its simplicity, undisturbed through all the turmoil. In fact, the realized universal appears to be nothing else but this on-going eruption and demise of particular passions.

So if we are going to understand how the passions can be the instruments of reason, we must get clear the nature of both the original subjective intention and the achieved end.

Hegel says that the goal of history is to produce freedom. By freedom he does not mean absolute independence – isolation from all constraining influences – but rather self-determination.

What does that term “self-determination” mean? In the first place there is a self to be determined. It starts out as relatively indeterminate. In the second place, the self initiates a move to determine itself. That means it gives itself a character it did not originally have. It becomes different. In the third place, when it does become determinate it has reconstituted itself. The determinations make up what it is to be. They are distinct, yet moments within its integrated unity. Through such an integration of specific characteristics, the self is individuated and becomes an individual. On the one hand it includes all the determinations developed so far

and so becomes something general; on the other hand it thereby makes itself so distinctive that it can only be named, not categorized. It becomes, to use Hegelian jargon, a concrete universal.

This is the nature of freedom – the goal of human history. But Hegel wants to say something more. This dynamic structure of freedom is nothing else but the nature of reason itself. As worked out in his *Science of Logic*, and summarized in the chapter on “Absolute Idea,” reason has turned out to be a process of determining indeterminate universals and thereby becoming other than what it started out to be.⁹ It is a process of reflection that brings all the various determinations together into a single perspective. And it is a process of integration that understands the parts within a singular, all-inclusive unity.

The subjective end that is to be realized in history is to achieve such a freedom – to embody reason.

What does the achieved end look like? Hegel calls it the state. That sounds contradictory to our modern liberal ears for whom the aim is to reduce the role of the state in society. The state is seen as the agent of repression, limiting the exercise of freedom, preventing people from fully determining themselves.

Individuals exercise their freedom, however, by responding to their passions. With basic instinctual needs, dissatisfied with the boring blandness of what they already are, their attention attracted and focused by their interests, they are driven to determine themselves in particular ways. The contingency and diversity of the passions inevitably lead to conflict, not only with the established order, but also with each other. If one individual has come sufficiently to terms with herself to be a fully integrated individual, she nonetheless finds herself struggling against the interests and needs of another. His actions frustrate her ends. In the struggle they wear each other down, developing over time customary responses that allow each to achieve satisfaction, that provide a more secure base for their free actions.¹⁰ These conventions become some of the determinations that the self has initiated and that the self must reappropriate.

The state is the result of this interaction happening over and over again, a network of conventional institutions that has emerged over time as individuals have exercised their freedom. Each new structure has emerged because it enables some individuals, or groups of individuals, to determine themselves more adequately and to be less prey to external influences and the caprice of others. The complexity of modern society has come about because of the drive to full self-determination.

Social structures develop their own life. There is a division of labor that enables a society to determine itself – reflective agencies, decision-making

agencies, executive agencies. In this way society too develops; by making more specific its determinate functions it achieves its own freedom.

Just as individuals are not able to determine themselves absolutely, but always find themselves determined by their environment, by their fellows, and by the state in which they live, societies do not live in a world of their own. States interact, their passions leading to struggles in which each is worn down until new conventions emerge – this time the conventions of international relations. In this way freedom becomes more comprehensive, incorporating the total picture of human interaction.

There is, however, a fly in the ointment. For time passes, and the individuals who have been part of the development of social conventions die, to be replaced by others “who know not Joseph.” Indeed we need not be so melancholy. Individuals themselves change, and their interests and passions become different. Conventions alter in response to other interests and new passions. The structures that established individual freedom become fetters that restrict it – perhaps not for all, but for some. And passions erupt. New interests, not noticed before, emerge. Institutions are challenged, sometimes within the limits allowed by the constitution, sometimes so strongly that state and civil society are shattered.

These contingencies are also part of freedom’s self-determination. Chaos comes again; passions return to the struggle; they batter against each other, wearing each other out, and wearing each other down. Through the struggle new conventions emerge – new institutional structures that may be both more comprehensive and more liberating. Or they could be more restrictive and oppressive, initiating new passions and new eruptions. There is no end to history. It continues in an infinite regress. As in the logical analysis of teleology, the pattern of final cause repeats itself endlessly through a series of transient successes.

Yet there is an end or purpose to it all nonetheless. That purpose is the process of history itself: the process of reacting against what is already there as old hat, conventional, abstract and general; the process of introducing new particular determinations that are diverse and distinct; the process of allowing those passions to wear each other down. It is just that process that is freedom. And it progresses because each new contingent outburst of passion responds to, and determines, the achievement already made.

Individuals and societies have finite ends. The freedom they achieve is inevitably limited. The only full self-contained end is one in which the end and its objective means would be one and the same – when freedom is the process. But such an equilibrium is never reached. Contingencies ensure that the ideal integration of what history is to be and what it actually is

remains an ideal. As contingent historical events continue to emerge, we humans never effect the transition from 'final cause' to 'life.' For the full reciprocity between objectivity and subjective end never becomes finalized. History, with its contingency, remains in the realm of finite teleology. Only when philosophy, made wise through its study of logic, enables us to identify the structure of reason itself, can we recognize how reason uses the passions of history to produce freedom. But that moves us beyond history to the realm of absolute spirit.

12

Absolute Spirit

We now come to the third of Hegel's absolutes. The contingency of history ensures that the passions and actions that make up its fabric cannot be directly identified with the governing purpose that ultimately governs its destiny. Were we to have only its ongoing flow of events, we could discern no pattern. For we, too, are embedded in its contingent particularity, each of us one among many, bedeviled by our particular interests and perspectives. Only if there is some way of rising above this relativity, can we begin to see history as a realm manifesting the logic of teleology.

Through our involvement in spirit absolute, says Hegel, we can achieve this God's eye view. With this claim he seems to suggest that, in the last analysis, contingency is relative, and will in the end be absorbed into the all-consuming necessity of ultimate reality. If our thesis about the necessity of contingency is to hold, this appearance of a final dissolution of everything accidental must be dissipated. This requires a detailed examination of what he actually writes.

Hegel's only discussion of "Absolute Spirit" is found at the end of the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*.¹ It contains three sub-sections: on art, revealed religion and philosophy. In this it resembles the concluding sections of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where the religion of art and manifest religion anticipate absolute knowing.

Spirit is the life of self-conscious individuals interacting within a play of forces that produces communities, of varying degrees and complexities. In principle it can cover the whole spectrum of human life. Indeed, it is through our reflection on human history that we begin to get a picture of that spectrum as a whole.

But we, as finite human individuals, are also aware that spirit incorporates much more than can be encompassed in our limited perspective.

In some aspects of our life – art, religion and philosophy – we are made aware of our finitude and catch anticipations of the infinite.

In great art, the artists are grasped by a transcendence that overwhelms their own individuality. Idiosyncrasies are subordinated to their intuitions of what is ultimately significant. And those who contemplate the works of art – architecture, sculpture, poetry or drama – can themselves become inspired by the intuition of a spirituality that overreaches their finite particularity.

Contingencies, however, enter in, and artists do not unambiguously articulate the genius that inspires them. Works of art can become intentional products of limited interests and concerns. So it is not always easy or possible to discern the ultimate within the relative and insignificant.

In revealed religion, however, it is claimed that spirit absolute makes itself manifest in human life. It is not simply a case of our trying to reproduce our personal intuitions of the transcendent, but rather a matter of the transcendent becoming immanent, and making itself known. This incursion of spirit absolute into human life, however, must happen in history – as a series of events. And the account of those events and of their significance becomes a set of stories, handed down by tradition.

To be sure, revelation is not simply a matter of events reported from the past. For the divine initiative evokes a human response. And out of that interaction there develops a life in the spirit where humans become participants in the dynamic of ultimate reality.

As we have seen in Chapter 4, this mutual interaction is not simply a pattern of positive reinforcement. The stories tell how the historical incarnation of spirit absolute dies; and this triggers, on the part of believers the awesome experience that God himself has died – that spirit as the transcendent beyond is no more. It is out of this mutual experience of negation and death that a full spiritual life emerges. And it is the believer, living within this dynamic, who begins to share in the life of spirit absolute.

Even here ambiguities and contingencies enter. For revealed religion transmits its truths by way of specific doctrines and stories; and each of these doctrines and stories has an independent character. They come down from the tradition as positive givens, and we have no insight into the inherent necessity by which they articulate the life of spirit absolute. For all that we, as believers, live within that life, we do not yet have full self-knowledge. We do not understand how and why that life functions as it does.

This deficit is remedied by philosophy. Not any philosophy, however. In a long remark Hegel chastises both the kind of philosophy that only

wants to analyze out particular items, but is not interested in the dynamic of conceptual thinking, and the kind that throws up its hand at any attempt to break up reality into its components, and retreats into a romantic appeal to intuition. When Hegel privileges philosophy, he is talking about that kind of thinking which works conceptually, incorporating the method outlined in the logical chapter on "The Absolute Idea."² In this kind of thinking, simple, immediate beginnings articulate themselves into contrasting opposites; then these opposites develop a reciprocal relationship that binds them together into a new, more comprehensive unity. It is this kind of thinking alone which is able to grasp the inherent necessity underlying the intuitions of art and the revealed doctrines of religion, and which can tell us of the purpose that exploits the passions of history.

But does this necessity eschew all contingency? To answer that question we must turn to the final three paragraphs of the *Encyclopaedia*. In them, Hegel outlines three syllogisms, or inferences. In the first edition of 1817, they sum up the whole development of his philosophy to that point, the pattern of its appearance, now collapsed into "the truth aware of itself."³ He seemed dissatisfied with that move, so he dropped them altogether in his expansion of the text in the second edition of 1827. Three years later, however, they reappear, this time with a new introduction.

As in 1817, he has just talked about how conceptual thinking can take the way immediate beginnings appear, and raise them up into their pure principle which is their element. Then he starts §575 with these words: "It is this appearance, which initially establishes the further development." The culmination of self-knowledge through philosophy does not mark closure, it seems, for new developments – new appearances – will emerge. It is worth citing these paragraphs in full, one by one.

... What constitutes the first appearance is the *syllogism* which has for its foundation the *logical* as a starting point and *nature* for the middle term that integrates *the spirit* with [the logical]. The logical comes to be nature, and nature comes to be spirit. The nature which stands between spirit and its essence does not separate them into the extremes of finite abstraction, nor itself into something quite independent of them, which as other would only be brought together with something alien. For the syllogism is *in the idea*, and nature is determined essentially only as a transitional point and as a negative moment – as *implicitly* the idea. But the mediation of this conceiving has the external form of a *passing over*, and science has the external form of a movement of necessity, so that it is only in the one extreme that the freedom of

conceiving as the bringing together [of its appearance] with itself is posited.⁴

Here we have a syllogism of transition – of a passing over from pure thought to nature, and then from nature to spirit.⁵ Nature does not stand as an independent and alien other, isolating pure reason from the life of spirit. As with the subjective intention in teleology, the original conceptual thinking – the “Idea” – ensures that the whole process hangs together. So thought commits itself to nature – to that which is alien to thought. And from what happens inevitably, as natural results lead on to spiritual reflection, spirit learns how its own natural existence is an embodiment of pure reason. That movement from thought through nature to spirit is a movement of necessity, though bedevilled with contingency; freedom emerges once spiritual reflection recognizes how the logical has achieved concrete fulfillment through this transition.

Hegel's description is quite abstract. But the pattern is familiar. The move from pure thought through external nature to some kind of spiritual result is what happens when we act deliberately – when the will initiates a natural sequence so that its intention can be realized. It describes episodes throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as convinced claims to knowledge put themselves into practice, and learn from the resulting failures. But the same pattern is also captured in religious doctrine, when it talks about the creation of an external world and of finite human spirits; or when it talks about the divine being born in a specific place and at a specific time as the way of moving towards a spiritual community. It is found in the logic of teleology, as a subjective intention adopts objective means to accomplish its end. And it is found in the logic of cognition, when, under the “Idea of the good” reason attempts to make objects conform to subjective concepts. Its most developed form happens at the end of the *Logic* itself, when pure reason declares itself redundant, and abandons itself to a consideration of nature.

Into this paragraph, however, Hegel introduces the term “science.” And the whole discussion concludes a section entitled “Philosophy.” So some have looked to his system as supplying the material he particularly has in mind. The *Encyclopaedia* follows just such an order: from *Logic*, through *Philosophy of Nature* to *Philosophy of Spirit*; and Hegel suggests that there is a kind of necessity embedded within this sequence. That this is to read too much into this syllogism is suggested by Hegel's referring to the “external form” of science. If one sees only a necessary sequence, one does not recognize how the various moments condition and require each other in a structure of mutual implication. One does not notice that each

component – logic, nature or spirit – introduces contingencies that the others have to take into account or respond to. So Hegel's philosophical science, in its completeness, has not yet come on the scene.⁶

This first “appearance” that grounds any “further development” encapsulates, then, a fundamental motif in Hegel's philosophy: the willed move from pure thought to natural implementation and on to spiritual reflection. But, as we have seen consistently throughout this study, that motif always involves the emergence of contingencies that are not expected or anticipated. For all that nature does not stand isolated and independent, it is nonetheless characterized by the fact that, whatever prior conditions set the stage, it is a realm of external relations, where reason is impotent to implement fully its own agenda, so that spirit must simply observe and take seriously whatever emerges if its reflection is to reach genuine freedom.

We now turn to the second syllogism: §576.

This appearance is taken up, transformed and cancelled in the *second syllogism* to the extent that this is already the very standpoint of spirit, which is what mediates the process, by *presupposing* nature and bringing it together with the *logical*. Within the realm of the idea, this is the syllogism of spiritual *reflection*: science appears as a subjective *cognition* whose goal is freedom and it is itself the way to bring it about.⁷

The second syllogism is a syllogism of reflection – of looking back over what has emerged in nature, and discerning the logical within it. This captures the logical moment of synthesis, where the disparate contingencies of nature are brought together to reveal their logical significance. What becomes clear from Hegel's notes is the importance of the adjective “subjective.” He is here describing what any number of individuals do in their own separate ways. By mentioning soul, consciousness, intelligence and will, he recapitulates the elements of his philosophy of subjective spirit – his anthropology, phenomenology and psychology – and he suggests that all of the activities (or faculties) discussed there are captured in this second “appearance.” The reason spirit undertakes this reflection is so that it can be free – so that it can fully anticipate the effects of its actions and thus accomplish what it has in mind. This is the intention of modern science: not only the natural sciences of physics, chemistry and biology but also the social sciences of psychology, politics, sociology and economics. We reflect on what is given so that we can act intelligently. Once again, however, this syllogism captures aspects of revealed doctrine: how God, taking account of the fall of human beings into self-centered

evil, initiates a move to re-establish communication; and how human beings, shattered by their own evil and the reported death of the incarnate one, seek to come to terms with transcendence.

This is why Hegel also uses the terms “cognition” and “knowledge.” He is describing the process where spirit, through analysis and synthesis, tries to find concepts that accurately capture the nature of objective reality. It is, as well, the process that repeats itself throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the results of experience are taken into account when developing a new kind of knowledge claim. Indeed, what are the *Philosophy of Nature* and the *Philosophy of Spirit* if not the reflective work of spirit in its quest to comprehend the real world and discern its logical structure. So even Hegel’s philosophic science, with its grasp of the true essence of things, will be the final result of this “syllogism.” But since the contingency of subjective cognition ensures that not all spiritual reflection produces truth, science at this stage makes only its first tentative appearance.

Here the focus is not on action with its contingencies, but on its results – the effort to take account of nature and external events, and to find the principles which explain them. Nonetheless contingency remains, for the subjectivity of diverse conscious and intelligent individuals results in a thousand different interpretations, which can vary from the significant to the trivial.

§577 The third syllogism is the idea of philosophy, which has *self-knowing reason* – the absolutely universal – as the *middle term* that divides itself into *spirit* and *nature*: making the former into its presupposition as the process of the *subjective* activity of the idea and the latter into the universal extreme as the process of the *implicitly* objective, existing idea. This *self-dividing* of the idea into the two appearances (as found in the previous two paragraphs) defines them as *its* (that is the self-knowing reason’s) manifestations. And this dividing integrates itself within reason so that it is the nature of things – the concept – which moves itself forward and develops, though this movement is equally the activity of cognition. As absolute spirit the eternal idea, existing in and of itself, eternally sets itself to work, engenders and enjoys itself.⁸

The third syllogism involves disjunction: where pure reason, well aware of its own capacities, distinguishes its two moments, not only as spirit and nature, but also as the two previous processes of action and reflection. At the same time it holds them together as ways in which the full idea is both active and existing. The relationship between two contraries can be extended even further. For the inevitable movement through nature

to spirit brings to bear the objective nature of things, while the reflective cognition of spirit is the result of subjectivity. As a result we have a double movement. The objective movement corrects and refines the subjective, just as subjective reflection distinguishes the essential from the accidental in the realm of nature. In this way pure reason is able to rise above the contingencies of both previous syllogisms. It “frees itself from other goals and representations,” and also “holds off the momentary, contingent and temporal,” not by any unique ability of logical thought, but by allowing the two contrary movements to rub against each other, and wear each other down.

Here we have the ultimate articulation of the double transition, noticed so often before. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, knowledge claims need to be acted out to have their flaws corrected, just as action leads not only to conflict but also reflective resolution. In the *Science of Logic* the “idea of the true” needs to be balanced by “the idea of the good” and both are brought together in the pure method of the absolute idea. In the *Philosophy of Nature* and *Philosophy of Spirit* thought sets the parameters, but then must observe carefully what nature is like and how society actually functions, before it can bring the two together into a new conceptual framework or paradigm.

It is here that philosophic science finds its fulfillment. By not taking any initiative of its own, pure thought immerses itself in its subject matter – the transitions of nature and the reflective conclusions of spirit – and allows them to work. But by bringing them together into a single perspective it can see how they are integrated into a single, comprehensive pattern. Philosophy provides the “overview” of everything that has gone on before.

It is easy to slip into thinking of the ‘Idea’ as some kind of comprehensive entity. But a moment’s reflection will remind us that, when Hegel comes to talk about the absolute idea, he talks about the logical method. When reason is fully aware of its own nature, it distinguishes within itself the way its own spiritual activity involves putting that method into practice as a subjective initiative, and the way subjectivity finds existence, objectively, in the world of nature. In other words, it is the method of pure reason itself which distinguishes the two kinds of appearance outlined in the previous paragraphs while insisting that they are not discrete processes, but manifestations of its own, single, dynamic life. This kind of comprehensive self-knowledge is only suggested in the doctrines of revealed religion, where life in the spirit is to lead believers into all truth. It is philosophy alone that brings the two transitions together into a single understanding of the way the world is.

In the last phrases of this final paragraph, Hegel stresses that this is not the end. The nature of things is that this dynamic self-division and self-reconstitution will move forward and develop. It will not stay where it was, in an eternal recurrence of the same. Absolute spirit, as the full self-knowledge of reason, will continue to be active, producing contingencies, and thereby reproducing itself in a richer form. Indeed, the life of absolute spirit involves nothing less than continually enjoying this dynamic process.

It is this pure self-knowledge which enables the philosopher to recognize in the contingencies of history the workings of reason as it brings about freedom. But he does not thereby discard all these contingencies. He remains embedded in history; his achievement is an ideal, which immediately becomes relative and subjective as "new occasions teach new duties and time makes ancient good uncouth."⁹ The unexpected will continue to erupt, as the essential, negative moment inherent in all method, all transitions and all reflection.

13

“Building the World as It Ought to Be”

Hegel's clearest statement about the necessity of contingency can be found in the Preface to his *Philosophy of Right*.¹ One cannot predict the future nor give instruction as to what the world ought to be, he says. For philosophy always comes on the scene too late to give it. Actuality has to be “already there, cut and dried after its process of formation has been completed,” before the ideal can first appear over against the actual and “apprehend this same real world in its substance and build it up into the shape of an intellectual realm. When philosophy paints its grey on grey, then has a shape of life grown old.”²

Earlier he had made the same point: “The task of philosophy is to grasp *what is*; for the *what is* is reason. With respect to the individual, each one is moreover a *child of his time*; and philosophy is also *its own time grasped in thought*. It is just as foolish to suppose that any philosophy goes beyond its contemporary world as that an individual leaps out of his age – jumps over Rhodes, so to speak. If his theory in fact goes beyond his own time, building for himself a world *as it ought to be*, it certainly exists, but only in his opinion – in a soft and tender element which allows anything one wishes to be constructed.”³

Contingencies must have occurred before they can be incorporated into philosophy, he seems to be saying; and any attempt to work out beforehand what future events will be, will find itself controverted by the unexpected.

There is, however, a certain irony about these comments in the Preface. For the constitution Hegel describes in the body of the *Philosophy of Right* is like none that ever existed – and certainly did not exist in 1819. Where, for example, can we find a legislature where the lower house has representatives from corporations formed around particular commercial interests? One might point to the pre-1832 English House of Commons

where the members were elected by incorporated boroughs; but when an industrial city like Birmingham had no members, whereas a rural byway like Tintagel had two, one could hardly call this a pristine example of Hegel's description. Nor is the constitution he describes in any way modeled on Prussia, where the king at the time was reneging on his promise of a constitution, made during the Napoleonic wars, and where there was no legislature at all.

Here indeed we seem to have Hegel giving instruction as to what the world ought to be, of going beyond his contemporary world. But the example is instructive. In the first place, Hegel did not go into all this constitutional detail in either the first Heidelberg edition of the *Encyclopaedia* which preceded the *Philosophy of Right* by several years, nor in the later two Berlin editions of 1827 and 1830, though in all cases he does claim that a government needs to be monarchical without specifying that it should be hereditary.⁴ In the second place, 1819, when he was writing this expansion of a section of the 1817 *Encyclopaedia*, was a time when discussions about a constitution were current in Berlin, stimulated by Frederick William III's promise during the patriotic wars. The proposal for representation in the lower house of the legislature may have been intended as a contribution to that debate. In the third place, the assassination of the dramatist Kotzebue by a radical student had provoked the Karlsbad Decrees and the introduction of press censorship in the German states. This probably lies behind the fact that it took two further years for the *Philosophy of Right* to appear; and Jacques D'Hondt suggests that the disclaimer in the Preface that philosophy arises on the scene too late to tell the world what to do might have been laid as a red herring to appease the censors, who would read the Prefaces and Introductions of works carefully, but not bother with all the detail of long and abstruse arguments.⁵

In any event this proposal about what the world ought to be turned out to be most ineffective. It remained simply an opinion – that “soft and tender element which allows anything one wishes to be constructed.” Representation by corporation never had a chance; and hereditary monarchs have virtually passed out of existence. Hegel's attempt to influence the future fell afoul of those very contingencies which, according to the Preface, need to be there already before philosophy comes on the scene. So if Hegel had intended to suggest what was genuinely necessary for a valid constitution, and wanted to dismiss contingencies, he was singularly unsuccessful. It is not surprising that, once events passed him by, he reverted to the more general analyses of the later *Encyclopaedia*.

We can find other clear examples of this lack of caution in Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*. Unlike political philosophy, in which opinion can

often exercise its sway without fear of clear-cut disproof by events, the natural sciences submit their theories to experimental testing. Initial hypotheses are soon shown to be soft and tender, needing to be toughened up with a healthy dose of actuality. And it is in his handling of the data of science – mechanics, physics, chemistry, geology and biology – where we can see to what extent Hegel attempted to “build the world as it ought to be.” Indeed, one standard rebuttal of this part of his system, based on a quick reading of his dissertation, claims that he “proved” there to be only seven planets, just at the time that Ceres was discovered between Mars and Jupiter.⁶ He is dismissed as someone so impressed with the a priori power of reasoning that he refused to consider how contingent experience could surprise our expectations.

This particular charge is, of course, a caricature. It attacks Hegel at a time when he was still influenced by Kant and Schelling’s method of construction and proof. Later, in the *Encyclopaedia* of 1817, he explicitly rejected the approach taken in the dissertation.⁷ And H.S. Harris, among others, has shown that Hegel soon showed himself well aware of developments in astronomy.⁸

Nonetheless, when we turn to what he wrote about chemistry, not in his first, hesitant ventures, but during his final years as a distinguished professor in Berlin, we find that he is not afraid to challenge theories put forward by natural scientists, theories that soon became standard doctrine. And in the process he showed that he had little skill in predicting the way science would develop. So we can use this material as a test case for considering what happened when Hegel tried to “build a world as it ought to be.”

I

There are three main areas where Hegel mounted his polemics against what would become the consensus among scientists: the chemical theory of elements, the atomic theory, and the explanation of galvanism as an electrical rather than a chemical process.

(1) Hegel challenged the idea of a single table of elements that ranged from hydrogen and oxygen through sulphur and phosphorus to the noble metals of silver and gold. These substances are qualitatively so distinct, and their chemical functioning so diverse, he maintained, that there is no single chemical classification under which they can all be placed.⁹

To be sure, he recognized that all of these substances, as well as the more recently discovered potassium, chlorine and strontium, were likely to be chemically simple; they could not be decomposed into more basic

components. But it was one thing to have a list of simple substances; it was quite another to claim that they were all of the same basic order or classification – that they functioned as elements.

Hegel reserved the term “elements” for oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen and carbon; these are not only the basic constituents of water and air, but more importantly they are the agents of chemical differentiation, converting inert metals into compoundable oxides, caustic alkalis and acids. Although he does not mention it, these four had also already been shown to be the chemical constituents of most organic material. Other simple substances do not play the same role. They are the kinds of things that become differentiated once they are united with one or more of the four elements. To be sure, they can frequently be united among themselves into salts, but salts are neutral, not chemically differentiated bodies.

Because the elements like hydrogen and carbon function so differently from combustibles like sulphur, and metals like iron and gold, Hegel separated them into different classes of chemical bodies, rather than lump them all together under a single heading of elements.

(2) Working from the principles of Newtonian mechanics, the Englishman, John Dalton, proposed that chemical substances are composed of atoms, their differences being determined by the distinctive specific gravity of their basic particles. “Atom” here was not used in our present sense, as a dynamic system of protons, neutrons and electrons. Atoms were rather the ultimate, indivisible particles of matter, a basic stuff defined in the language of inert substance, not of process and force. The Swede, Berzelius, from whom Hegel derived his understanding of chemical atomism, theorized that these ultimate particles were spheres, and since a sphere can have direct contact with no more than twelve other spheres, the maximum number of atoms that could be combined into a molecule was 13.

For Hegel, any atomic theory of this sort could not hope to provide an adequate explanation of chemical phenomena. In reducing chemicals to indivisible spherical particles, it left the space between quite empty. So a chemical combination becomes nothing more than a mechanical conjunction. There is no real interpenetration, no real union. A body is not transformed qualitatively from one kind of thing into another. In other words, according to the atomic theory of his day, all the phenomena that chemistry investigates are nothing but unreal appearances, a show that has nothing at all to do with hypothetical reality.

This difficulty in chemical atomism highlights the basic problem with any traditional atomic theory. It can explain the differences between things, but it can explain relations only as spatial and temporal

conjunction. By reducing everything to matter in motion, to inertia and reaction, it converts causal transformation into an irrational surd. Even the physical approach to matter as attractive and repulsive forces cannot elucidate what happens when two things combine to produce something that is qualitatively different from either of them in isolation.

The theory of chemical atomism, then, is only one half of an explanation, and throws no light on the peculiarities of chemical affinity.

(3) Electricity was first noticed as the product of friction. Then Galvani discovered how it could be generated by constructing a circuit of a zinc and a copper wire together with a frog's leg or a human tongue or eye. In 1800 Volta reported that he had constructed an electrical device that required neither friction nor organic material. A pile of alternating zinc and copper plates, with moistened cards separating each pair, generates a noticeable electrical charge.

Almost immediately investigators discovered that chemical changes resulted from the process. The copper was oxidized, hydrogen appeared at the negative pole. In due course, Humphrey Davy and Berzelius were using the device to decompose substances that had previously been impervious to dissolution: potassium from potash, calcium from lime, chlorine from muriatic acid, fluorine from fluoric acid. Galvanism was not only an electrical phenomenon, but also a chemical one.

There was much discussion in the scientific community about whether the process was primarily chemical, with electrical side effects, or electrical, triggering chemical changes. While Humphrey Davy started out convinced that the process was chemical, Volta and Berzelius maintained the other position, and ultimately Davy changed his mind. Berzelius went so far as to identify the degrees of elective affinity in chemistry with the strength of the positive or negative electrical charge inherent in any substance.

In two different contexts, once in the *Encyclopaedia Philosophy of Nature* of 1830, and again in the second edition of the *Science of Logic* of 1831,¹⁰ Hegel took vigorous exception to Berzelius' electro-chemical theory. Electricity is a transitory phenomenon, he maintained. A charge can be built up progressively, but when it becomes too great, a spark relieves the tension, and the bodies return to their original state. Chemistry, in contrast, involves bodies being transformed qualitatively into products that persist and have a measure of continuing independence after the process is complete. That relatively permanent change in quality cannot be explained using strictly electrical terms, and Hegel took great delight in citing those passages where Berzelius confessed that his theory left questions mysterious or unexplained.

To reduce a complex phenomenon to a simpler one does not proffer a genuine explanation: it illuminates similarities but leaves the differences – which are precisely what demand explanation – in obscurity.

In a similar way, Hegel challenged the attempts to explain organic processes using chemistry. While he recognized that analysis had shown nitrogen to be a basic component of nerves, for example, he denied that appealing to the four basic elements of oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen and carbon can tell us anything about the distinctive way living organisms function. They have a self-reproductive and self-maintaining capacity alien to the simple transformations of chemical process (which are fully exhausted once the product has been achieved). Indeed, to reduce a living body to its elements is to kill it, to condemn it to death.

So just as chemistry cannot satisfactorily be explained in mechanical or electrical terms, neither can the phenomena of life be fully understood using just a chemical analysis. Such reductive explanations leave the most puzzling differences quite obscure.

II

These, then, are the polemics Hegel mounted against the scientists of his day, despite the fact that all of the theories attacked – the theory of elements, atomism, and electro-chemism – were to prove productive in the ongoing development of chemistry. Does this mean that he was dismissing the contingencies of nature, simply deducing his theoretical conclusions from a priori axioms?

When we turn to the scientific culture of his time we find that, even in his polemics, Hegel had some evidence for his side. All three topics were not simply disputes between Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* and natural science, but were indeed argued among the scientists themselves. A number of them had designed experiments for deciding between two or more such theories, but none of these had been definitive. The theoretical questions were still open. So Hegel, not himself an experimental scientist, was not questioning the data, but only discussing theories, where a good sense of rational argument had as much a role to play as contingent empirical observations.

At the same time, Hegel was not ignorant of that data. His written Remarks in both the *Encyclopaedia* and the *Science of Logic*, as well as his lectures, more or less faithfully reported by diligent students, make abundantly clear that he was informed on the state of chemical investigation. Let me illustrate this in terms of the three areas of dispute I have already cited.

First, regarding the elements: As we have seen Hegel was well aware of the way chemistry had decomposed potash and muriatic acid into potassium and chlorine. Indeed he changed his terminology for one set of basic substances in later editions of the *Encyclopaedia* from “earths” (which Berzelius and Davy had shown to be compounds) to “metalloids,” his term for simple, non-metallic solids.¹¹ And in 1805 he cited as “metallic moments” the recently discovered osmium, iridium and palladium.¹² His disagreement was not with the search for ultimate sorts of chemical stuff, but with classifying all of them under a single category.

Instead, he said, the classification of *chemical* bodies should be a function of the processes of chemical transformation. Since transformation involves substantial qualitative changes, the body that goes into a process is of a different order from the kind that comes out. So Hegel situated chemical bodies within four classes: metals, metallic oxides, combustibles and salts. This classification of substances (in which “earths” had earlier been used for the oxides) had a long history, and Whewell tells us in 1837 that the newly discovered elements were being distributed into these classes according to their analogies with previously known materials.¹³ Combustibles, when burnt, certainly convert into acids and caustic alkalis, but these latter are so unstable that they cannot be classified as bodies. The only simple substances that surface in this classification, then, are metals, and combustibles like sulphur.

Hegel recognized, however, that science could deliberately devise artificial processes to separate out unstable simple substances. Since these operations were rigorously controlled, he called them “abstract” separations, to distinguish them from more natural, concrete ones. Many of the newly identified substances such as fluorine, aluminum and potassium are the product of such abstract separations, but are seldom found as independent bodies in nature. Only oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen and carbon are to be called elements, for they alone explain the chemical differentiation of bodies into oxides, acids and alkalis, and also exist independently.

Moreover, when analyzing the logic of measuring he uses specific weight to illustrate how we measure something’s basic quality: not only the ratio of weight to volume but also the ratio between this specific weight and the specific weight of the compounds formed with other bodies. In this discussion it is clear that he has chemical substances in mind, and that specific weight shows how they are qualitatively differentiated from each other.¹⁴ So Hegel recognized at the time that science was identifying a growing list of metals, of combustibles and of abstract substances like chlorine, even though he refrained from calling them elements.

What is of even greater interest, in terms of the history of science, is a remark which Hegel added to this discussion. Dalton and Berzelius had gone a long way toward discovering the specific weight of most simple substances. Hegel said that it was not sufficient simply to use these figures for purposes of comparison. What was needed was a rule or rational principle that would organize them into a systematic pattern.¹⁵ Their arithmetic diversity needed to be specified as a series of harmonic nodes. In other words, he identified the intellectual puzzle which Mendeleev resolved when he discovered the periodic table.

This demand for some kind of rational principle or rule that organizes natural diversity into a system is the demand for an explanatory hypothesis. It is a challenge, not for further empirical analysis, but for reflection and thought. It is this demand, Hegel added, which lies behind the search for a rule governing the distance of the planets from the sun – one of the problems discussed in his dissertation. Far from deducing a priori the number of planets, or the specific weights of substances, he claims to be looking for a rational framework that sets them in context.

Second, regarding atomism: In his *Essay on the Theory of Chemical Proportions*, where he advanced his atomic theory, Berzelius attacked Schelling's *Philosophy of Nature*, which claimed that matter is the result of opposing forces, one contractive and the other expansive: "It is precisely because of this way of envisaging chemical combinations that the phenomena of determinate proportions has never been so unanticipated by philosophy than in the very time when one has begun to notice and verify them. They would have remained for ever unknown under the aegis of this philosophy and in particular by the direction it has taken in the last fifteen years."¹⁶

Hegel took umbrage at this attack, pointing out not only that he had discussed how definite proportions measured a specific quality in the first edition of his *Logic* in 1812, but also that Richter, one of those who contributed to the understanding of this phenomena, had been a student in Königsberg, influenced by Kant and his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*.¹⁷

The theory of definite proportions recognized that chemicals combine, not in a continuous range of ratios, but only in certain specific ones. Indeed, as Hegel went to great lengths to point out in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Nature* in 1819–20, these proportions fall under a simple rule or progression: 1, 1½, 2, 4, 8 and so on. So lead combines with oxygen in only three ratios: 1:1, 2:3 and 1:2. Similar progressions govern the neutralization of acids and bases in salts, and, within that process, the ratio of the alkali's oxygen to the acid's radical.¹⁸

Hegel rejected the claim that this rule of simple progression provided the evidence for atomism. Nonetheless, if chemicals can only combine in simple multiples, and do not combine over an indefinite range, they appear to be composed of basic, indivisible units. Talk of counteracting forces cannot do justice to such evidence.

Hegel, of course, did not simply adopt Schelling's and Kant's theory of matter as opposed forces. He admitted that measuring determinate proportions requires the use of units, one for the denominator and a multiple of one for the numerator. But he denied that this involved reference to atoms – to spheres moving mechanically in empty space. To be sure, Hegel's rejection of atoms as indivisible units ultimately proved justified, when they were dissolved into complexes of protons, neutrons and electrons. Nonetheless it was the language of atomism that stimulated further investigation by scientists into the ultimate constituents of chemical substances. Hegel's polemic offered no useful counter model.

Third, regarding electro-chemistry: The theory in which galvanism was explained primarily in electrical terms was much discussed in Hegel's time. In defense of his polemical stance against it, Hegel referred to work by a colleague in chemistry at the University of Berlin, Georg Friedrich Pohl. Building on the conclusion of an earlier chemist, Johann Ritter (not to be confused with Kant's student, Jeremias Richter), Pohl argued that one could not discern any electrical charges in the liquid between the positive and the negative poles of the electric cell, even though the electro-chemical theory postulated that the water was conducting a current. On this basis he claimed that the circuit was the product, not of electrical charges, but of the chemical activity of water. At one point it united chemically with negative electricity to form oxygen, leaving the pole positively charged; at the negative pole the water combined with positive electricity to form hydrogen.¹⁹

Further, the electro-chemical theory hypothesized that, when an acid and an alkali are used as the opposite poles of a battery, some of the acid slips through the medium to neutralize the alkali at the other pole, and vice versa. Litmus tests, Hegel pointed out drawing on Pohl's experiments, provided no evidence for the presence of either an acid or an alkali in the intervening medium.²⁰

Fundamental to the galvanic process, said Hegel following Pohl, is the active functioning of water. It is not a passive conductor, as the electrical theory supposed, but initiates and maintains the dynamic. Yet Hegel did not take over Ritter's hypothesis that the water entered into a chemical union with the two electrical charges. He not only admitted that water is decomposed by the process into hydrogen and oxygen, but

used this as part of his justification for calling them, together with nitrogen and carbon, elements. In opposition to Pohl, he identified the activity of water not as combination but as separation.

Pohl's experiments were sufficiently crude to be of little value in deciding the theoretical debate. Inevitably he relied on one or two to make his negative point against Berzelius, not giving his own hypothesis any rigorous examination. Nonetheless his credentials as a chemist had earned him a chair at Berlin, and Hegel, in his attack on Berzelius, believed he was relying on expert counsel. Some of Pohl's evidence was thought to be of sufficient value that it could be used in Hegel's polemics, even if Hegel's knowledge of other chemical investigations prevented him from following Pohl all the way. As we have seen William Whewell admitted the force of Pohl's arguments prior to the discovery of the electric circuit by Faraday in 1833.

While, in appealing to Pohl for support, Hegel turned to a less than reliable source, he nonetheless was not basing his claims simply on his own *a priori* considerations. He was taking account of data provided by chemists. In his polemics he was not challenging the value of their continuing discoveries, but rather the theories scientists advanced to make sense of them.

III

We have, then, one final question to ask. What are the principles upon which Hegel grounded this confidence that theory could build the world as it ought to be? And do they remove any central role for contingency in his thought?

(1) In his long Remark on Berzelius' electro-chemical theory, Hegel ventured into sarcasm: "A previous sort of natural philosophy which has attributed (or rather dismissed and trivialized) the system and process of animal reproduction to magnetism, or the nerve system to electricity, did not schematize more superficially than does this reduction of concrete corporeal opposition. With justice such a practice of being short with the concrete, of overlooking what is distinctive and fleeing into abstractions is repudiated in that case. Why not also here?"²¹

Hegel, apparently, did not think he was fleeing into abstractions, overlooking distinctive differences, or being short with the concrete. This was why he could not accept the unitary classification of elements. Chemically considered, inert metals are quite different from combustibles like sulphur. And the noble metals, like silver and gold, can hardly be compared with oxygen and hydrogen as the omnipresent constituents

of chemical differentiation. Reflective thought has to take seriously those phenomenal differences. And any theory that simplifies data by constructing abstract models, such as spherical atoms, or by conflating electrical discharge to chemical affinity, cannot do justice to the rich diversity of nature. One has to be genuinely empirical, to "take up the determinations of the objects of observation as we know them in our ordinary consciousness."²² It is this failure to account for major empirical differences between concrete chemical substances that condemned the chemical theory of elements in Hegel's eyes. In this regard, at least, he does not appear to be dismissing the role of contingency.

(2) Atomism falls afoul of another principle. "It is necessary," wrote Hegel, "to take chemical processes in their entirety. To isolate particular parts, or formal, abstract processes, leads to the abstract representation of chemical process in general as merely the *influence* of one substance on another; which means that much else that occurs appears secondary and contingent, or at least as only externally connected, not considered as an essential moment in the relationship of the whole."²³

This, then, is the second moment in being thoroughly empirical. If, on the one hand, one should not collapse differences into simple classifications and abstract models, one should, on the other, consider all the complexity of the total picture. An explanation that focuses on a particular feature, considering it as functioning without reference to anything else, and then turns to another in equal isolation, cannot hope to be complete. One needs to distinguish the various moments, to be sure, but one must also identify the relations between them, the mediating links by which one substance is transformed into another.

Traditional atomism fails to meet this standard. By talking of chemicals as indivisible, spherical particles, it might be able to explain differences (by appealing to specific weight, for example) but it can do no justice to the way oxygen and hydrogen, for example, are so inextricably united in water that they cannot be divided by any mechanical means.

To comprehend chemical phenomena one has to consider not only bodies, but also the processes they either condition or result from; one needs to look at *all* the conditions necessary for a process to function, as well as *all* the products. And one must discover how all the various moments are related together within a single, dynamic transformation of qualities. One's empiricism needs to be total; that is, it does not leave out any determination but holds all of them together in one.²⁴

Once again, the reasons for Hegel's rejection of the developing science of his day do not stem from any attempt to dismiss contingency. Rather, it is because scientists, in their search for simplicity, were too ready to

overlook complications that put their theories into question that they were challenged. Indeed, the development of atomic theory in the twentieth century came about because the original version of indivisible particles could not do justice to all the empirical phenomena. If Hegel did not have a correct solution for explaining the phenomena in their totality, he at least recognized that there was a flaw in the explanations of his opponents.

(3) That total picture, however, has its limits. For chemical process represents a distinct stage that is clearly distinguishable from electricity (which has less permanent results) and organics (in which the living process is self-initiating and self-maintaining). So, in the totality of nature, philosophy needs to distinguish stages of phenomena, each of which represents a different level of complexity. At each stage one considers the total picture, but one does not confuse the issue by trying to reduce a more complicated kind of phenomena to one that is simpler and more basic.

A full comprehension of nature must respect that variety of levels. For, according to Hegel, there are no metamorphoses in nature. Electricity does not of itself convert into chemical change, and chemical activity cannot of itself generate life. Each stage has its own network of relations, and while those processes may be incorporated into a higher stage, they no longer function in the same way. For they are then governed by a more comprehensive integrating focus.

This refusal to collapse more complicated phenomena into the explanatory framework suitable for simpler data again does not seem to involve a refusal to take seriously the role of contingency. Indeed, just the contrary. It is rather scientists, impressed with the explanatory power of the theories already developed, who try to force more complex data into that procrustean bed. So the principle behind Hegel's objection to electrochemical theory was a question not of imposing a conceptual scheme a priori, but rather of taking the contingencies of nature seriously. It was only after Hegel's death that Faraday showed that electricity was in fact a more complicated phenomenon than Hegel supposed, a discovery that would have required a rethinking of Hegel's organizational schema.

Only reflective thought, or philosophy, can recognize how the full description of one stage has an implicit pattern. Using its logical resources to make precise discriminations, thought recognizes how differences and relations interact. And once it considers the whole network of relations at that stage, it recognizes in principle the structure of a more integrated kind of nature. Such conceptions, derived by reflective thought, are, however, only possibilities entertained. They cannot predict a priori what

kinds of more integrated beings nature in fact will offer, nor how they in fact function. For that we must turn once again, with a thoroughgoing empiricism, to the differences and the relations that contingently emerge in the natural realm at that level of complexity.

Hegel's polemics against the chemists of his day – his inability to anticipate the way chemistry would develop – were based, then, on these three principles. One has to take the concrete differences of things seriously; one has always to keep the total picture in mind; and one should not confuse the various levels of complexity but understand each on its own terms. These three principles undergird his philosophy of nature. But all of them involve taking phenomena seriously, and not imposing a priori convictions on recalcitrant data.

How, then, does this *Philosophy of Nature* of Hegel's compare with the work of chemists? Did he think that philosophy was destined to replace empirical research and analysis?

It is clear that philosophy recognizes the role of, and can provide no substitute for, the work of analytic chemistry. Theory helps to decide which experiments to undertake; much later, for example, gaps in the periodic table pointed to chemicals that would otherwise go unnoticed. At the same time, using carefully constructed experiments in the laboratory, the chemist is able to isolate ever more arcane basic substances and to generate new kinds of artificial compounds, finding definite proportions and affinities that can only be maintained by deliberately altering conditions such as temperature and pressure, and by relying on diverse kinds of catalysts. As a result, the philosopher, removed from close contact with the details of chemical experimentation and measurement, cannot hope to come up with the explanatory models of a Faraday or a Mendeleev.

All of this empirical work is the task of the chemist, not the philosopher. The only obligation of the reflective thinker is to remain aware of the total picture, of all the discoveries with their qualitative distinctions and interrelationships.

Yet when chemists venture into theoretical explanations philosophers have something to say. The latter will applaud when a Mendeleev determines the principles of the periodic table, for that exposes the rationality implicit in empirical diversity. And they will accept the theories which show the importance of oxygen in combustion or its role in neutralization. But the explanatory power of theories can be tested by asking about their explanatory power: do they overlook significant differences by reducing the complex to the simple? Or, in their concern to explain some puzzling features, do they ignore and forget others.

Philosophers are able to test chemical theories against such basic logical principles. For these principles articulate the underlying dynamic structure (or method) that is inherent in the whole universe.

Hegel, then, did not claim (as Schelling did) that the rational patterns discerned by the philosopher can function as empirical hypotheses to direct and determine future experimentation. By and large they operate at much too general a level. Yet he failed to recognize that various contemporary theories concerning the elements, atomism and electrochemistry, for all of their contingent inadequacies, might nonetheless enable chemistry to advance in its analysis of basic substances and synthesis of compounds until, in due course, new problems would expose their fundamental logical flaws.

14

Philosophy after Hegel

If Hegel is serious in maintaining that contingency is necessary, then he cannot claim that he has provided all the answers. The achievement of philosophy in understanding the structures of pure thought, the patterns underlying nature and the dynamics of human society are never complete. For contingent events will emerge that challenge what has already occurred and require new attempts at comprehension and explanation. In other words, philosophy is always moving forward and developing.

We can find some evidence in support of this claim from Hegel himself. For he was not averse to reworking his systematic argument. Walter Jaeschke's edition of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*¹ has made us aware of the way Hegel thoroughly revised the order in which he treated the religions of the ancient world each time he presented the course. Similar changes can be found in the various editions of the works he published during his lifetime. In some parts of his *Logic* we can find five distinct stages: the first edition of the larger work (1812–16), the three editions of the *Encyclopaedia* version (1817, 1827 and 1830) and the second edition of the Doctrine of Being from the *Science of Logic* (1831).²

For our purposes we shall provide only one illustration of this work of revision. I shall take this from the *Logic* since it is the work that would be most likely fixed a priori by thought. That should be enough to demonstrate that, even for Hegel, the system was not closed, but amenable to much revision and reworking.

The concept we shall choose for examination has, unfortunately, no obvious English translation. The German term, *die Sache*, or *die Sache selbst*, has as dictionary equivalents: "thing; cause; action; case; matter, affair, business, concern; event; fact; circumstance." It can be used to say: "come (or stick) to *the point*," or "I must know what is *the truth of the*

matter." In other words, it is designed to express a critical point or concern, a focus of attention.

It is perhaps this very fluidity in meaning that allows Hegel to introduce it at quite different stages of his systematic development. And in so doing, he alters its philosophical significance.

In the larger *Logic* of 1813, the term surfaces toward the end of his discussion of grounding or providing a sufficient reason. He has introduced the concept of conditions, as a way of explaining how a grounding relation works. By means of a set of conditions, something can be brought about. But this requires a clear distinction between any particular condition, and the actual process of grounding; for each condition on its own is not enough to trigger the change, and on the other hand, a thing can be grounded by quite different sets of conditions. Closer examination shows that any condition, insofar as it is a condition, is not simply some independent existing entity, but is directed toward something else that it can condition. In other words, it is independent of the grounding relation, yet a central constituent of it. Similarly, that grounding relation requires independent conditions to bring the result about, even though one can also consider it in the abstract. In a sense, the conditions provide the content, while the grounding relation provides the form. But they are, in fact, one and the same structure. We have a single unconditioned pattern, which we can call *die Sache an sich selbst*, or the inherent matter in question.³

From this point Hegel goes on to show that, once we consider the whole picture in its totality, we reach the conclusion that, when all the conditions are present, the *matter in question* must come into existence.

So much for the analysis of 1813. The term *die Sache* does not surface as a significant term in the 1817 *Encyclopaedia*. But it returns in 1827 and 1830.

By then we find that *die Sache* is still connected with conditions, but the context is quite different. The discussion of ground and grounding is long past, and he has moved into his discussion of actuality: of possibility, contingency and necessity.⁴ The three "moments" involved in relative necessity, Hegel writes, are condition, *die Sache* and activity. *Die Sache* is the totality of the conditions that make up the content of the process; the activity is the movement inherent in the form, which activates the matter in question and transforms it into something actual. The necessity of the movement from possibility (as condition) to actuality is not unconditioned, but limited by the particular content of the matter in question. So we have only a relative necessity.⁵

Here *die Sache* has shifted subtly in meaning. It is no longer the unity of conditions and the grounding relation, but rather one constituent – the element of completeness – which must be combined with the individual conditions and the activity in a necessary relation, one where something *has to* result from its conditions.

The most significant change, however, happens in 1831. To be sure, we do not have a revised version of the Book II, on Essence, where the earlier discussion was found. But *die Sache* now surfaces at the end of Book I, in the Doctrine of Being, within the chapter on measuring.

Hegel has been describing the process by which we try to get more accurate measurements, by considering how things actually “measure” themselves. This happens, for example, when entities prefer a close relationship with some things but not with others – what the chemists of the time called “elective affinity.” But even then we find that there is no single measurement. For sometimes, as we change the quantities of the two things that are combined only slightly, we find that there are abrupt changes in quality. These quantitative shifts cannot explain or do justice to the qualitative transformations that emerge. We have a real transformation that is not measurable. Within this picture, the underlying substratum remains essentially the same, but the surface qualities vary and alter. That substratum Hegel now calls *die Sache selbst*, the heart of the matter. There is here no talk of conditions, of grounding or of necessity; all of those terms are yet to come in the systematic advance. So our critical term has become much more vague and imprecise, an anticipation of the concept of ‘essence,’ not a constituent of its developed meaning. It is what underlies surface changes in quality when we have only a vague sense of what is going on.

One wishes that we could read what Hegel had in mind for later sections in the larger *Science of Logic*. Would he have moved the discussion of conditioning into the chapter on actuality, possibility and necessity as a development of real possibility, as he had done in the *Encyclopaedia* and the lectures? And if he had done so, would he have continued to introduce *Sache* as a critical term within that analysis even though it had emerged earlier in a quite different context? If not, what would he have replaced it with? On these questions we can only speculate. Nonetheless, we do see that he was quite prepared to move critical concepts to quite different places in his analysis, giving them thereby quite different meanings. He was not bound to a single logical construction. The contingency of new thoughts and considerations led him to new philosophical positions.⁶

Since Hegel himself was ready to incorporate the results of new contingencies into his systematic argument, we are freed as his heirs from being bound to the exact arguments of his system whenever we want to continue with his approach to philosophy. While drawing on his insights, we may find ourselves constructing new systematic patterns. The easiest place to see what might happen were we to do this is the *Philosophy of Nature*.⁷ For here much of the evidence Hegel draws on for his discussions of astronomy, physics, chemistry, geology, botany and zoology has been disconfirmed by later developments in science. And much new material has been discovered. Elective affinity, for example, no longer provides the key to chemical change in the way that Torbern Bergmann claimed in the late eighteenth century. Biology is now built around the evolution of new species, even though Hegel said that there are no metamorphoses in nature.⁸ Months after Hegel died, Michael Faraday proved that the changes produced in the galvanic cell are primarily the product of electrical currents, not of chemical interactions, as Hegel had so vigorously maintained.

If, however, Hegel advocates the necessity of contingency along the lines we have argued in this book, some promising perspectives open before us, and we can venture to suggest how his philosophy might contribute to the advance of scientific thinking, not only about nature, but also about our contemporary world as a whole.

To develop this perspective we need to move cautiously and circumspectly. I shall first review what is the core of Hegel's logical method and what role it plays in organizing the material provided by the scientists. Then I shall explore how this method would operate once we accept from biology the evidence for evolution, and how that affects the way a philosophy of nature functions.

We have already had occasion to discuss Hegel's logical method. The understanding isolates a concept, removing it from any intellectual operation or association that led to it, so that its distinctive meaning can be clarified. When we thoroughly analyze a concept, however, we find that we are led dialectically to contrary and opposite conceptions. This kind of shift is not in one direction only. For when we analyze the antithetical term we are led back to *its* opposite – the concept with which we began. There is a double transition, a feature, Hegel reminds us, of utmost importance.

It is this double transition which connects the two concepts in a synthesis, which thought can consider as a totality. This new move is the work of speculation, or positive reason. Now we notice not simply the negative differences, but also the positive bonds that hold the two terms together. We have a sense of the whole.

This opens the prospect for the next move. For a synthetic totality of this sort can be integrated into a single term. Understanding's abstracting function collapses the reciprocal dynamic into a simple unified concept, ready to be analyzed in its turn. The cycle begins again.

What happens, however, when we turn from the *Logic* to the *Philosophy of Nature*? At the end of his discussion of the Absolute Idea or method, as we have seen, Hegel says that pure thought makes itself redundant.⁹ It is prepared to encounter a realm quite different from thought. In place of rational networks of internal relations, its components will be externally related to each other; no implicit meaning leads from one to another. Yet thought can anticipate that whatever we discover in nature will be amenable to being described in logical terms. For in the logic's dialectical moments, we have learned that 'difference,' 'externality,' 'contingency,' 'particularity,' and many other such terms are required whenever we want to do justice to 'being,' 'internality,' 'necessity' and 'universality.' Faced with the contingency of nature, we find ourselves applying the former set as independent terms on their own because they fit the world we in fact experience.

How, then, does Hegel propose to produce a *philosophy* of nature? For philosophy requires that we think – in this context, that we think about what is radically different from thought.

Schematically, it seems to me, it happens this way: Thought thinks about what would be quite other than thought – its most general and basic characteristics. Then it looks to experience to see what contingently fits that description. Next it sees what key patterns develop. We analyze and abstract the phenomena that match our original projections, and notice the significance of what happens. Finally we take our original thought and incorporate into it the contingent results that have emerged. We create a speculative synthesis, and from this we generate a new concept that integrates the various elements into a single thought. Once we have that thought, we then turn back to nature to see what in fact fits this new template.¹⁰

We can illustrate this pattern by drawing on a discussion of Stephen Houlgate's. He claims that there is a distinctive logic of nature, which provides "a logical deduction or derivation of the basic determinations of nature." "We begin," he says, citing Hegel's lectures of 1823–4, "with the determination of externality. ... We then ask, 'If we look around in nature, what do we call that which in our representation corresponds to this thought?' and we see that this is space." From this Houlgate concludes "that, strictly speaking, the philosophy does not deduce the necessity of *space* as such. It deduces the necessity of *externality*, and we

find in experience that space is what most obviously corresponds to such externality."¹¹

Thought, then, looks in nature for abstract externality and finds that space corresponds to its concept. Further, thought looks for what would be the negation of pure space and finds that to be a *point*. When we then ask what would be other than a point, we discover a *line*, and if we repeat the question, we come to a *plane*, and then an *enclosing surface*, which separates off a single complete bit of space.¹² At each stage thought has asked its question, and found in experience an answer to that question.

How does thought generate its next question? Houlgate says: "Hegel goes on to argue that the negativity of space considered 'for itself' is time and that the unity of space and time is place."¹³ In other words, the next move does not happen using pure logic, but incorporates space and time, each of which initially only *corresponds* to our thought, but has now to be included into a new concept. We need to look at this more closely.

In the paragraph where Hegel introduces time, he does start with the logical term 'negativity.' But this is not negativity pure and simple: it is the negative relation between *point* and pure *space*; it is a negativity that develops its determinations as *line* and *plane*, all terms which have come from our experience, not our thinking. The question philosophy has asked at this point, then, is: what happens when *this kind* of external negativity exists on its own account ("for itself") and is indifferent to the peaceful juxtaposition of *space*. To this question, philosophy must look to experience to find the corresponding answer: *time*.¹⁴

The critical move is the move from one stage of the philosophy of nature to the next. We have initiated a stage by developing a conceptual framework, and we then turn to experience to see what corresponds to that framework in nature. The aspects of that stage worth noticing are those that respond to particular expectations of thought (in the case of space, simple externality and negative otherness). But in the next move we take our original template and build into it the contingent phenomena that have emerged in our investigations. Integrating these requires a new single thought; we ask what kind of concept could combine this premise and this reality into a pattern of reciprocal interaction. Thought integrates what it has discovered with its own theoretical resources and formulates a new conceptual perspective.

As in the *Logic*, thought is required to analyze the starting point for any stage in the *Philosophy of Nature*. We need to understand what we are looking for. And thought is required to integrate the results of its investigation to produce a new kind of concept. There needs to be a speculative synthesis. The two disciplines, however, differ in the intermediate

stage. In the *Logic*, dialectic passes over to an antithesis or contrary in the very process of understanding its initial concept. In the *Philosophy of Nature*, in contrast, thought “declares itself redundant,” looks to see what in nature corresponds with its analyzed starting point, and incorporates the results of these observations into its final reflections.

In Chapter 9 we examined this kind of synthetic move in some detail: While geology has outlined an organic structure that was not living, it also brought to bear incipient moments of self-determination. Thought brings these two aspects – the prior conception and the resultant experience – together into the concept of a living organism. Then botany shows that vegetable nature (which fits this template) has parts which tend to perform different functions even though they can adapt so that any part can become a whole. Thought wonders what would be involved if one put original concept and the results of observation together and had a living organism with distinct organs, each responsible for a single function. The fact that experience does offer something that matches each of these templates, and that each is the result of combining conceptual anticipation and resulting experience, offers evidence that nature is ultimately grounded in reason.

On this reading of the *Philosophy of Nature*, new experimental evidence requires a reworking of the systematic story. Galvanism would need to be moved back from the section on chemical process to that on electricity, once Faraday’s research was published and confirmed.¹⁵ And the conclusions drawn by Darwin and Wallace on the evolution of the species would require a significant rethinking of how the whole *Philosophy of Nature* functions. To some speculative reflections on this latter question we now turn.

In his introduction to the *Philosophy of Nature* Hegel says that nature is to be regarded as a system of stages, where one follows another with a kind of necessity. This might suggest that he advocates some form of natural evolution. But he immediately goes on to say that this is not to be understood as if each stage is generated by a *natural* process. It happens rather within the implicit, internal idea that constitutes the ground of nature. In other words, metamorphosis does not occur in nature, but only in that conceptual thinking which grasps the underlying rationale of the universe.¹⁶

In his written remark, Hegel makes his rejection of evolution explicit: “Any thinking consideration must completely reject such nebulous and in principle sensuous representations as (in particular) the so-called *emergence* of (for example) plants and animals from water and then the *emergence* of more developed animal forms from lower forms, and so on.”

His lectures expand this point further: "The way of evolution, which starts from the imperfect and formless, is as follows: at first there was the liquid element and aqueous forms of life, and from the water there evolved plants, polyps, molluscs, and finally fishes; then from the fishes were evolved the land animals, and finally from the land animals came man. This gradual alteration is called an explanation and an understanding; it is a conception which comes from the Philosophy of Nature, and it still flourishes. But though this quantitative difference is of all theories the easiest to understand, it does not really explain anything at all ... It is important to hold fast to identity; but to hold fast to difference is no less important, and this gets pushed into the background when a change is conceived only quantitatively. This makes the mere idea of metamorphosis inadequate."¹⁷ There is no evidence, says Hegel, that nature on its own manifests any developmental transition from stage to stage.

For Hegel, the prevailing conceptions of evolution involve simply adding new features to simpler elements. It is, he says, a "quantitative" procedure. In some way or other lungs get added to mollusks, wings and legs to fish, and wombs to land animals. On his view, a fully scientific explanation needs to incorporate negativity – a dialectic whereby differences and opposites are equally productive. The negativity whereby contraries interact by distinguishing one from the other must be incorporated into any more complicated succeeding stage. In his day biologists had not shown that the process in which negativity or non-union is integrated with union or identity happens in nature, at least in the relations between species and genera.

It is instructive to compare Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* with his *Philosophy of Spirit*. Unlike nature, spirit can dwell with death and incorporate that negativity into its life. This means that experience never presents us with the most basic forms of spiritual life in isolation, or with abstracted capabilities.¹⁸ For spirit as it now exists has incorporated its past history into its present. As a result, the *Philosophy of Spirit* must learn to distinguish carefully the various constituent moments of our human existence, and to identify the way they interact, moving through failure and negativity on the way to more comprehensive forms. Immediate intuitions disappear into the dark pit of the subconscious before resurfacing as conventional ideas; the conscious conjunction of meaning and sign becomes mechanical and unthinking before liberating pure thought; abstract right leads to fraud and crime before we can begin to talk about social structures; nation states call on their young to sacrifice themselves in war before we can talk about international relations. It is

this interaction between the negative and the positive which generates history's progress toward freedom. As the negatives that frustrate life progressively emerge and are then incorporated into a more overreaching spiritual dynamic, humans become better able to determine themselves and their own future.

Nature, in Hegel's view, is unable to do this. Its genera and species are fixed. To be sure, living organisms can interact with their environment to maintain themselves, and indeed pass through the metamorphosis of egg to caterpillar to chrysalis to butterfly. As well, individuals are able to adapt; a dog can learn to tend sheep or guide the blind. But that development stops once the animal dies, and it has to be initiated once again from the beginning with each new pup. What is learned by the individual does not get passed on to the species.

Darwin challenged that whole conception of nature. What made his explanation of evolution so effective was that it incorporated negativity more successfully than those put forward in Hegel's day. Morton O. Beckner summarizes his theory of natural selection this way: "(1) Populations of animals and plants exhibit variations. (2) Some variations provide the organisms with an advantage over the rest of the population in the *struggle for life*. (3) Favorable variants will transmit their advantageous characteristics to their progeny. (4) Since populations tend to produce more progeny than the environment will support, the proportion of favorable variants that *survive and produce* progeny will be larger than the proportion of unfavorable variants. (5) Thus, a population may undergo continuous evolutionary change that can result in the origin of new variants, species, genera, or indeed new populations at any taxonomic level. Darwinian natural selection may accordingly be defined as a differential *death rate* between two variant subclasses of a population, the lesser death rate characterizing the better-adapted subclass."¹⁹

What Darwin's theory did not easily explain was why successful variations develop in the first place. It was not until the twentieth century that biologists realized that genetic material can remain recessive throughout generations, and then emerge once it is combined in a new way with other genetic material through sexual reproduction.

This makes a second aspect of Darwin's theory of interest; for he suggested that, in the competition for a mate, certain features might be more successful in attracting desirable partners and so come to predominate, while less endowed individuals die without progeny. But the features that are noticed as desirable may change, as a result of changes in the environment. Once again there is a creative interaction between contingent context and organism that produces new kinds of individuals.

In this summary we find features that capture elements of Hegel's rational method: first, overpopulation is the result of a successful species pushing its inherent potential for life to the utmost. This then produces the opposite of what is intended, for in the struggle for survival, death overwhelms those variants least able to acquire food or produce offspring. Survivors successfully integrate their inherited characteristics with the new circumstances of the environment. The interplay of positive overproduction and the negative struggle for survival on the level of the species resembles the way each organic individual appropriates and resists incursions from its setting in maintaining its singular existence.²⁰ One could say that it is in the reciprocal interaction between organism and environment – conflict and new integration – that new forms of life emerge.

The theory advanced by Darwin makes evolution fit more easily into a Hegelian framework because it incorporates negativity. But it has more radical implications. For now we can say that metamorphoses *do* happen in nature – not by simple quantitative addition but by the interaction of positive and negative forces. A new species emerges from the struggle for survival, because it is a more successful and integrated than its progenitors. More complicated natural stages are not simply theoretical constructions, but develop through inherent natural processes on their own.

Our understanding of evolution, however, remains a theory, well confirmed though it may be. While evidence has gradually accumulated to provide both confirmation and revision, the overall picture is a construction of thought. And as such it can easily adopt many presuppositions from previous science, in particular, an understanding of cause as linear and mechanical, rather than a conception of development as the work of reciprocal interaction. Evolution is too often understood as a progressive accumulation of more complex characteristics, not as a process where creative contingencies and established habits enter into a struggle where much is lost, for all of the inevitable gains.

Theory determines where one looks for evidence, and what kinds of things one identifies as causally effective. It is always underdetermined by empirical data. That is to say, alternative explanations, which also take account of all the data, are always possible. But this means that reflective thought has a critical role to play in examining basic presuppositions. So once philosophy is fully sensitive to the empirical evidence that scientific investigation discovers, it may make a contribution to the development, and criticism, of such presuppositions, particularly those that are so familiar that scientists are not prone to notice them.

In other words, there is a reciprocal relationship between philosophy (or reflective thought) and science. On the one hand, philosophy must

listen to, and take account of, the discoveries of science. Even if thought may ultimately question theoretical presuppositions, the results of conscientious investigation do tell us what nature is actually like. At such points thought must declare itself redundant. On the other hand, philosophy can explore the way scientific thought develops and determines its concepts, showing implicit connections that are frequently overlooked in the heat of the hunt, and identifying operations that have disappeared from view under a blanket of custom and tradition.

We can suggest how this might develop by constructing a dialogue between a Hegelian philosophy of nature and evolutionary science.

First, the fact that evolution had an explanatory model that fits with evidence discovered in the Galapagos and the Indonesian archipelago opens up a wider understanding of the way nature functions than Hegel himself had allowed. The critical shift from one stage to the next need not happen simply in the realm of pure thought as philosophy integrates the contingent results of experience with its conceptual arsenal to produce a new template. Nature itself makes such transitions – not always successfully, but nonetheless significantly. As a result, not only do we need to make thought redundant whenever we observe what nature is like at a particular stage. We also need to observe carefully the way new forms emerge in fact.

Second, reflective thought can suggest other conceptual models of explanation for the way such developments takes place – models more promising than the conception of a linear causal sequence that traditional science has carried over from mechanics. When evidence places any explanation of how nature advances in question,²¹ then a reconsideration of the concepts being used, their presuppositions and their implications, may well turn out to be productive.

Unfortunately, science has expanded in a geometric progression since Hegel's day. No longer is it possible for a single person, even one with as much natural curiosity as Hegel,²² to be up to date on the most recent developments in all its many subdisciplines. So it would be presumptuous for a mere philosopher to tell science how to proceed and how to organize its experimental observations. Nonetheless it may be possible to suggest some ways in which Hegel's philosophical method might play a role in developing a comprehensive understanding of nature – not by anticipating the results of future investigation in biochemistry or astrophysics but by suggesting alternative ways for fitting data into a complete picture.

Evolution has introduced the concept of history into nature. Since Darwin's time, explanation using natural development has been extended far beyond the realm of the living to include not only the formation of

rocks and shifting of continents but also the emergence of matter itself from energy after the "big bang." To be sure, there is in natural processes no appropriation of events by self-conscious persons as there is in historical ones. Nonetheless, past events do become incorporated into, and retain their influence on, later bodies and states, serving as a form of petrified memory. And remnants of this past from time to time rise to the surface to produce, when united with other contingencies, new elements, new compounds and new organisms.²³

To indicate how a contemporary Hegelian might apply his logical insights to the world of nature, then, we could do worse than draw some analogies with what Hegel has to say about human history and its dialectic.

Significant developments in history happen behind the back, so to speak, of the actors and agents. As we have seen the primary engine of historical development is our human passions – immediate, quasi-instinctive reactions to emergent events: "It is what we may call the *cunning of reason* that it sets the passions to work in its service, so that the agents by which it gives itself existence must pay the penalty and suffer loss." Hegel's comments leading up to this remark are also worth noting: "The particular interests of the passions cannot therefore be separated from the realization of the universal; for the universal arises out of the particular and determinate and its negation. The particular has its own interests in world history; it is of a finite nature, and as such, it must perish. Particular interests contend with one another, and some are destroyed in the process. But it is from this very conflict and destruction of particular things that the universal emerges, and it remains unscathed itself. For it is not the universal idea which enters into opposition, conflict and danger; it keeps itself in the background, untouched and unharmed, and sends forth the particular interests of passion to fight and wear each other out in its stead."²⁴

There is lots of negativity here. The various particulars attack and injure each other. In addition, however, there is reciprocity. There is a double transition as each one, following its own immediate impetus through, impacts on another, while the latter responds in accordance with its inherent drive. It is, in fact, this double transition which sets the stage for the next act. A *modus vivendi* develops which begins to institutionalize the conflict and its resolution; as that becomes normal and accepted, there emerges the structure of a new social order, the basis for a new kind of freedom. Freedom, suggests Hegel, simply results from releasing the destructive forces contained in the passions from their leashes. It unites a synthesis of violent reciprocal interaction into a revised but acceptable order.

All of this happens on its own, not because humans consciously intend it to work that way. The significant developments, though initiated by conscious reactions to hurts and insults, emerge from what goes on behind the agents' backs. They result from the interplay of passionate action in ways that no one participant anticipates. In other words, the progress of history is indifferent to the suffering of its protagonists.

But this is no different from what happens in nature. Natural forces expand and push for dominance, only to be frustrated and restricted by other forces. Whatever results is simply the product of that interaction, embodying the innovative responses that each side has had to make within the conflict. History, like nature, develops in its own way, quite unconcerned about the governing plans or strategies that its constituents might have.

In Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature*, as we have seen, the reconciling and integrating moment does not emerge directly from the interaction of mechanical, physical or chemical processes. It is rather the work of an independent reason that reflects on what it has observed. The underlying rationality of the universe – "God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind"²⁵ – provides the connecting link from stage to stage.

Now, however, we can ask whether we may not learn something by applying the logic of history to the realm of nature. For natural forces need not have a linear, mechanical progression. They interact, and that interaction can produce results quite different from whatever would have happened had each force been allowed to proceed on its own. Only if there is this possibility of contingent novelty emerging from conflict can we make sense of the early development of the universe, or of the strange forms animals take once a species is isolated on an island or removed to another continent. There is a kind of teleology present – a movement toward ever-greater complexity and adaptability. It is as if nature is taking the first, incipient steps on the way to freedom. If a long-lasting and successful species suddenly disappears from the scene, if a particular creative sport leads nowhere, it is not removed by some *deus ex machina* who has a transcendent plan in mind. Rather that venture simply cannot withstand the rough and tumble of the "abrading" torrent.²⁶ What survives is what adapts within that struggle. And so adaptation, ever more complex and comprehensive, is the goal of nature's historical development. For any species that successfully adapts is "freer" to achieve its immediate ends.

How, then, should contemporary philosophers of nature who want to remain heirs of Hegel proceed? They cannot presume to predict what

nature will offer as evidence. Nor can they prescribe how scientists should organize their investigations. Like Hegel, they must recognize that thought makes itself redundant in order to listen to what nature and its scientific investigation are telling us. But they will ask certain questions. At each stage they ask: are there identifiable processes where forces interact in a dynamic reciprocity – where there is a form of “double transition?” Can we find an interplay between matter and anti-matter? Can we see two chemicals reacting to each other in peculiar ways? Is there a significant interaction between a family of plants or animals and its environment where each does violence to the other?

These questions are quite different from those posed by Hegel. He asks: what in nature conforms to our logical expectations: of abstract externality, for example, or its negation? We are now looking instead to nature for those double processes in which two natural tendencies come into conflict and “wear each other down.”

But there is another difference. For, rather than gathering together all the evidence and reflecting on what kind of concept this might suggest, we turn back to nature and ask a second question: are there stages, not present before, that emerge from this interaction and not only incorporate the distinctive features of the previous dynamic, but also develop a stability that gives them permanence? These new integrated entities will have their own distinctive character, quite different from anything that has gone on before, yet derived from the preceding “struggle of the passions.”

It is tempting to rush in and apply this template willy-nilly to contemporary science. But only fools would undertake such a venture. For the answers to those questions have to be discerned by careful observation. And developing ever more sophisticated techniques to do that is the prerogative of disciplined and sensitive scientists. We must be content with simply suggesting this new approach to the philosophy of nature. Whether it in fact will provide new insights is for others to discover.

Appendix

An early draft of this chapter was sent to two colleagues in physics, both of whom had, as undergraduates, studied 19th century philosophy and German idealism. Their responses are of interest. Professor Ian Affleck, Professor of Physics and University Killam Professor at the University of British Columbia, writes: “I think there may be something to your idea (or Hegel’s idea) about conflicting natural forces. That seems to be the way physicists (and I presume other scientists) often think about phenomena. Other examples come to mind besides the ones which you

give: – the variation of air density with altitude can be simply modeled in terms of balancing the gravitational force on a layer of air against the net upward force resulting from the pressure of the layer below and (the lesser) pressure from the layer above; – the thermal equilibrium state of a system is determined by balancing the tendency to minimize the energy against the tendency to maximize the entropy (or randomness); – the formation of galaxies in the early universe is modeled in terms of a competition between the overall expansion of the universe, which makes objects in it (like small grains of matter) move apart from each other, and the gravitational force which pulls objects together. It often seems to be balance between conflicting “forces” which makes things the way they are. Whether this is something fundamental about nature or just about the way people think about nature is not so clear to me.”

Dr. Ranpal Dosanjh, formerly a postdoctoral researcher in physics and subsequently enrolled in the doctoral program in philosophy at the University of Toronto, writes: “One example I was thinking of: the nuclear structure of the elements is determined to a large extent by a negotiated equilibrium between the strong force and the electromagnetic force. On their own, a bunch of protons do not want to form a nucleus together, since the electromagnetic force drives them apart (all being positively charged). However, they are also subject to strong interactions, which are (fittingly) very strong but short range. There is not enough of a pull from the strong force arising from the protons themselves to keep a pair of them together. However, the addition of neutrons provides extra strong force attraction without additional electromagnetic effects. Thus as the size of the nucleus increases, new equilibria are achieved, resulting in different proton/neutron ratios.”

15

Conclusion

In the Introduction to his *Science of Logic*, Hegel writes: “I could not pretend that the method which I follow in this system of logic – or rather which this system in its own self follows – is not capable of greater completeness, of much elaboration in detail; but at the same time I know that it is the only true method.”¹

It has been the thesis of this study that Hegel’s method implies a continuous process of elaboration in detail, of reaching greater completeness. For it requires contingency, and contingencies will always disrupt whatever has already been achieved. At the same time, the method remains constant. For Hegel’s system to hope for any completeness at all it requires the “only true method.” That method refrains from telling the world what it ought to be; and allows for a continual reworking, not only of the *Philosophy of Nature* but also of the *Logic*.

Yet with what right can Hegel claim to have discovered the only true method? He proceeds from the passage above with the following: “This is self-evident simply from the fact that it is not something distinct from its object and content; for it is the inwardness of the content, the dialectic which it possesses within itself, which is the mainspring of its advance. It is clear that no expositions can be accepted as scientifically valid which do not pursue the course of this method and do not conform to its simple rhythm, for this is the course of the subject matter itself.”

Some of Hegel’s evidence for this claim we have considered in the course of our discussion. The method underlies the way we learn from experience, moving from the simple knowledge claim of sense certainty, through the various stages in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It also is found in the way pure thought analyzes terms only to discover the paradoxes that result, and then find a comprehensive way of integrating the whole

picture into a single perspective. It is implicitly present in the various levels of complexity found in nature, in the various forms of psychological activity, in the social constructions of family, civil society and state, and in the course of human history.

In all of this subject matter Hegel finds that the method is the “main-spring of the advance.” It is not distinct from thought, nature and history and simply applied to them, but the inherent dynamic of those spheres in their own right. Philosophy simply makes explicit the rationality of the world that is already implicit.

All of that, however, is not enough to establish Hegel’s claim to the only true method. For it is possible that this particular view of things is simply the way a particular species has successfully adapted to its environment for a limited period of time; contingencies might emerge that would transform the whole way things change. Rather than having reciprocal interaction generate new integrated unities, conflict could result in radical dispersion and ultimate disintegration. Human history could come to an end, and the integration that spirit brings to the realm of nature disappear completely from the universe.

Hegel does not anticipate such a development. For he builds into his system a critical moment – the moment of religion. Art and religion provide the spheres where humans experience direct contact with the ultimate nature of reality. For all that the religions of beauty and sublimity are relative and transient in significance, revealed religion enables humans to live in the life of absolute spirit. This dynamic life results from the death of the incarnate embodiment of the ultimate on the one hand, and on the dark night of the soul on the other. Out of the infinite agony of spirit, humans live in the life that encompasses all things. It is because that is already inherent in their existence, that they can understand its significance by recognizing therein the inherent dynamic of conceptual thought. Pure reason is simply this all-encompassing life in the abstract form of thought.

In other words, Hegel’s system is itself subject to an ultimate contingency. What happens when history moves on, and the revealed religion of Christianity simply becomes one belief among many; when the ultimate achievement of spiritual life is not the dynamic of action, judgment, condemnation and reconciliation, but rather the progressive advance of human technology or the quest for the achievement of a positive happiness. Science is used to dissolve depression with chemicals; education shelters children from any experience of failure; the legal system condemns without reprieve all those held responsible for accident or disaster; culture and society is organized to remove any source of disaffection.

To be sure, this is not the only strand present in our modern society. True believers, convinced that they have access to unambiguous certainty, are prepared to introduce havoc and destruction, whether through terrorism or unnecessary wars, because such action is designed to completely destroy what is evil – whether the Jews, Western liberalism or terrorism itself – and institute paradise.

The hope lying behind both approaches is that all contingencies can be eliminated, or at least rendered insignificant. That hope is grounded, either in a conviction that science is able to reach final certainty about the natural and social world, or that we have privileged access to unambiguous truth. In neither case do we find the dynamic, so central to Hegel's analysis of revealed religion, that all action produces evil as well as good, requiring not only condemnation but also mutual reconciliation.

On the other hand, there are those now convinced that there can be no genuine resolutions of conflict, no ultimate truths. Contingencies have the last word; they trigger disruptions that extend out in uninterrupted waves throughout the cosmos. All things are relative, and no belief takes full account of the particular passions underlying it, or the chance events that betray it. While this school recognizes the critical role of contingency, they deny that it can ever be incorporated into a larger picture, or fit into a systematic pattern.

Once the lived experience of ultimate reality that defines the contemporary world does not describe, even through doctrine and story, the dynamic central to Hegel's system; once history has moved on to new kinds of religious commitment, then the ultimate linchpin for Hegel's confidence has evaporated. We can no longer be sure that he has discovered the one true method. He is simply one voice among many.

To be sure, it could be that we are but in an intermediate stage of the method. We could be living through the conflict that comes when one side (the believers in certainty and progress) and its opposite (the believers in radical discontinuity) isolate themselves into extremes, each excluding the other, with the dialectical result that both sides become ever more reliant on the other in their differences.

But we could also have shifted into a new era, where old truths no longer hold. Faced with radical conflict between technological progress and "true believers," between those who affirm ultimate truths of science or religion and those who deny any such claim, we find that contingencies have disrupted even the method itself; and the future is completely indeterminate. Reconciliation, even interim ones, may well be impossible, and we are in the process of disintegrating into absolute death and despair.

In the last analysis, the question comes down to what we do with contingencies. On the one hand, there is the position adopted by Hegel, who says that contingencies are necessary constituents of a process that moves toward ever more development and richer complexity. On the other hand, there is either the “modern” concern to eliminate from our human existence all evils and unexpected contingencies and produce something approaching paradise, or the “post-modern” expectation that contingencies will reign unimpeded, and disruption rather than intermediate stages of reconciliation will be the final word.

Only time will tell which response will ultimately prove justified.

Notes

Preface

1. *Kantstudien*, 50 (1958–9); reproduced in *Hegel im Kontext* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971). Fackenheim refers to this paper in *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967) Appendix on "Contingency", 114–5.
2. Compare my comments in the first chapter of *Hegel on Logic and Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
3. (Paris: Aubier, 1999).
4. *Op. cit.*, 360–1, My translation. Before Mabilie, Jean-Claude Pinson had drawn the attention of French-reading philosophers to the role of contingency in Hegel's political theory: *Hegel: Le droit et le Libéralisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1989).
5. See G.W.F. Hegel: *The Jena System, 1804–5: Logic and Metaphysics* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1986).

1 Philosophy and history

1. The first part of this chapter is based on a paper presented to a group of Hegelians from Ontario and Quebec, meeting at Bishops University, Lennoxville, in 2005.
2. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, tr. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) p. 89. This is the only translation based on Hoffmeister's edition of the Introduction which separates the manuscript material from student notes: G.W.F. Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1955) p. 105.
3. G.W.F. Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 12 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1981) p. 166; *Hegel's Science of Logic*, tr. Miller (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969) pp. 746–7.
4. G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 20 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1992) §209, p. 213; *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, tr. Geraets, Suchting and Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), p. 284.
5. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen* 10: *Vorlesungen über die Logik* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2001) p. 207, my translation.
6. It is worth recalling that Emil Fackenheim, working from an article by Dieter Henrich, does stress the importance of chance and contingency in Hegel's thought. See *The Religious Dimension of Hegel's Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967) pp. 114–15.
7. For an example of Dunayevskaya's thought, see "Hegel's Absolute Idea as New Beginning," in *Art and Logic in Hegel's Philosophy*, ed. W.E. Steinkraus and K. Schmitz (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities, 1980) pp. 163–77. See also J. D'Hondt, *L'idéologie de la rupture* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978).

8. The next section is based on "Does Historicity Require a Different Metaphysics?" presented at the sessions of the Metaphysical Society of America in 1982, and later published in *Man and World*, 18 (1985) pp. 39–54.
9. See Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, §76.
10. P.F. Strawson, *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1959) p. 9, my italics.
11. A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Harper, 1960) p. 4, my italics.
12. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, A2, 982^a20ff., tr. W.D. Ross, my italics.
13. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, A2, 71^b14f., tr. G.R.G. Mure.
14. Aristotle's use of matter as the general principle of individuation became too restrictive for the Aristotelians of the middle ages, who as Muslims, Christians or Jews had to do justice to the uniqueness of history. They then introduced the concept of existence. See F. Rahman, "Essence and Existence in Avicenna," *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, VI (1958) pp. 1–16; A. Altmann, "Essence and Existence in Maimonides," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 35 (1953) pp. 294–315; P. Morewedge, "Philosophical Analysis and Ibn Sina's 'Essence/Existence' Distinction," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 92 (1972) pp. 425–35, as well as St. Thomas's opusculum *On Being and Essence*.
15. See F.W.J. Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856–61) Abt. II, 1.288f.
16. Compare in *Summa Theologica* I, Q2, A1, St. Thomas's distinction between what is self-evident in itself and what is self-evident for us, with the implication that we may need to start from experience to reach first principles which are self-evident in themselves, even though a science is only possible when one commences with principles self-evident in themselves.

2 The necessity of contingency

1. This chapter presents a version of "The Necessity of Contingency," presented at the sessions of the Hegel Society of America in 1974, and first published in *Art and Logic in Hegel's Philosophy*, ed. W.E. Steinkraus and K. Schmitz (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities, 1980) pp. 201–17. It was reprinted in *Hegel on Logic and Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) pp. 39–51. ©1992 State University of New York (All Rights Reserved) and is here reprinted by their permission.
2. The translation is my own.
3. The four stages are 'actuality' and 'possibility,' each considered as grounded and as groundless.

3 Secondness

1. This chapter derives much of its material from a discussion of H.S. Harris's *Hegel's Ladder* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997) presented at the meetings of the Canadian Philosophical Association in 1998, and later published in the *Owl of Minerva*, 33, 1 (Fall/Winter 2001–2) 27–39.
2. English, like German, can use the infinitive as a noun: "to seek is to find." But the need to include the particle "to" makes it far more difficult to use the expression in all contexts. The only tool we have for articulating a verbal noun in most situations is the gerundive: "seeking is finding." To be sure, German also has a gerundive "das Suchende," but the English gerundive is closer to the

German infinitive than the German gerundive form, which I tend to translate: "that which seeks."

3. Descartes uses the cube of wax to refute empiricism; Locke, in turn, dismisses innate ideas.
4. The most accessible reference for Peirce's discussion of the categories can be found in Chapter 6 of Justus Buchler's *The Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, "The Principles of Phenomenology" (New York: Dover, 1955), pp. 74–97.
5. All these are found in G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in *Gesammelte Werke* 9 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1980) pp. 57–8; *Phenomenology of Spirit*, tr. Miller, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977) §80, pp. 51–2.
6. See *Phänomenologie*, in *GW* 9, p. 56; *Phenomenology*, §78, p. 49.
7. *Phänomenologie*, in *GW* 9, pp. 60–1; *Phenomenology*, §87, pp. 55–6. All italics are in the original.
8. *Ibid.*

4 The 'infinite agony' of despair

1. The following started out as two different presentations made to gatherings of Hegelians largely from Ontario and Quebec held at the University of Guelph in 1997 and the Pennsylvania State University in 1999; and is an extensive revision of "The 'Infinite Agony' of Spirit," *Owl of Minerva*, 34(2) (Spring/Summer 2003) 171–86.
2. *Briefe von und an Hegel*, edited and annotated by Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Meiner, 1952–4) #155. English text found in *Hegel: The Letters*, translated by Clark Butler and Christiane Seiler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) p. 559.
3. *Briefe*, #158; *Letters*, p. 561. An interesting comparison can be found in John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*: "I was in a dull state of nerves, such as everyone is occasionally liable to; unsusceptible to enjoyment or pleasurable excitement; one of those moods when what is pleasure at other times becomes insipid or indifferent; the state, I should think, in which converts to Methodism usually are, when smitten by their first 'conviction of sin.' In this frame of mind, it occurred to me to put the question directly to myself: 'Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant, would this be a great joy and happiness to you?' And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, 'No!' At this my heart sank within me: the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to be found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for. ... I frequently asked myself if I could or if I was bound to go on living, when life must be passed in this manner. I generally answered to myself, that I did not think I could bear it beyond a year." [John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, Chapter V. (Indianapolis: Liberal Arts, 1957) pp. 86–7, 91.] A lengthy review, "Under the black sun" by Mark Hutchinson, in the December 23 & 30, 2005 edition of the *Times Literary Supplement*, has drawn my attention to the key role melancholy played in the thinking of the Renaissance and Enlightenment. Picking up some themes from Aristotle and Plato, Marsilio Ficino identified "melancholy

as a disposition characteristic of the outstanding individual." His work became "hugely influential throughout Europe."

4. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, pp. 418–9; *Phenomenology*, §785, pp. 475–6.
5. G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie*, in GW 20, §382, p. 382; *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, tr. William Wallace and A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) p. 15.
6. English often uses 'absolute being' when Hegel talks of God as the *absolute Wesen*, but this misses the fact that God is being understood as the non-relative *essence* of all things – a description which could apply to much more than the God of traditional religion. Even atheists may be prepared to explore what is the ultimate essence of reality.
7. This is why Wallace, Findlay and Miller's use of "picture thinking" to translate this German term is so misleading. It restricts reference to the subjective sense, and so a different term has to be used for the representational action of the second element.
8. Notice how this captures the language of a syllogism, with the major and minor terms being the extremes brought together by the middle term.
9. Some interpreters want to read Hegel's phrase 'I = I' as a reference to Fichte. But for Fichte the phrase refers to the positive self-affirmation of the ego, whereas here it is the negative loss of everything. I suspect something more ironic than a direct citation.
10. Compare St. John of the Cross: "Under the stress of this oppression and weight, a man feels so much a stranger to being favored that he thinks, and so it is, that even that which previously upheld him *has ended* along with everything else, and that there is no one who will take pity on him." *The Dark Night*, Book 2, Chapter 5, Paragraph 7; cited from *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. K. Kavanaugh and O. Rodriguez (Washington: ICS Publications, 1979), p. 337.
11. This appears to be more than a Feuerbachian glorification of the human. For humanity cannot take the place of God as ultimate substance, else one will revert to the earlier state, but with a different abstract essence. Rather, the dynamic flux of subjectivity is understood to be the nature of the cosmos – its ultimate rationale. And that extends to more than just the human.
12. *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, p. 27; *Phenomenology*, §32, p. 19.
13. *Enzyklopädie*, in GW 20, §376, p. 375; *Philosophy of Nature*, tr. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) pp. 442–3.
14. *Enzyklopädie*, in GW 20, §382, p. 382; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 15.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, p. 114; *Phenomenology*, §194, p. 117. I have drawn on Baillie's rhetorical flourishes, which capture the dreadful excitement of this moment. See *Phenomenology of Mind*, tr. J.B. Baillie (London: Allen & Unwin, New York: Macmillan, 1931) p. 237.
17. Hegel is suggesting here that a full-blown egoistic hedonism can frequently lead to suicide when it finds the world does not reward it as expected. Miller has obscured Hegel's double entendre: "... es erfährt den Doppelsinn, der in dem liegt, was es that, nemlich sein *Leben* sich *genommen* zu haben; es nahm das Leben, aber vielmehr ergriff es damit den Tod." GW 9, p. 201, ll. 8–10. ("It experiences the double sense which lies in what it did: namely to have *taken its life*; it took life, but thereby it rather grasped death.") Compare Miller: "It experiences the double meaning of what it did, viz. when it took hold of life and possessed it; but in doing so it really laid hold of death."

- (§364, p. 220) By omitting the two words Hegel stressed, and glossing 'nahm' as 'took hold of and possessed' he has watered down the full equivocation.
18. May I draw the reader's attention to my "Man, God and Death in Hegel's Phenomenology," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, XLII (December 1981) pp. 183–96; reprinted as Chapter 11, in my *Hegel on Logic and Religion* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991) pp. 119–30.
 19. Autobiography, V, (pp. 91–2).
 20. The change need not be for the better. The barren universality of Roman law was not more humane than the ethical substance of the Greek city, for example; and the agony of the unhappy consciousness was much less pleasant than the life of the stoic.
 21. *Enzyklopädie*, in *GW* 20, §§381–2, pp. 381–2, *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 8–15.
 22. On the nature of life in general, and its relation to animate and vegetative nature, see Chapter 8.

5 Absolute knowing

1. Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 274. This chapter draws on two articles: "Hegel's Absolutes," *The Owl of Minerva*, 29(1) (Fall 1997) pp. 23–37 (which was first read at the retirement of H.S. Harris from York University in 1996), and "Absolute Acting," *The Owl of Minerva*, 30(1) (Fall 1998) pp. 103–18.
2. G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopädie* (1830), in *GW* 20, p. 121; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 135.
3. Merold Westphal, *History and Truth in Hegel's Phenomenology* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities, 1979) p. 223.
4. E.E. Harris, *The Spirit of Hegel* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities, 1993) pp. 63, 221.
5. See F.W.G. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism: Werke* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856–61), I. 3, p. 600ff; translation by Peter Heath (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978) p. 208–9.
6. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie*, in *GW* 4, p. 12ff.; *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, tr. H.S. Harris & W. Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1977) p. 89ff.
7. *Phänomenologie*, in *GW* 9, pp. 17, 53–4; *Phenomenology*, §16 p. 9, §73 pp. 46–7.
8. *Enzyklopädie* (1817), in *GW* 13, §38 p. 36; *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings*, tr. Stephen Taubeneck, ed. E. Behler (New York: Continuum, 1990), pp. 68–9. *Enzyklopädie* (1830), *GW* 20, §85 p. 121; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 135.
9. See *Phänomenologie*, in *GW* 9, p. 299ff., 324, 400; *Phenomenology*, §552 pp. 336ff., §599 p. 365, §748 p. 453.
10. *Phänomenologie*, in *GW* 9, p. 431; *Phenomenology*, §803 p. 489.
11. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, pp. 12, 14; *Logic*, pp. 578, 580.
12. I have here simply reproduced the evidence that Katerina Deligiorgi explored in her thesis entitled *Divine Finitude: The Absolute in Hegel's Philosophy*. "Hegel, contrary to his reputation, and at least in the works I have dealt with (i.e. not the lectures), is very parsimonious in his use of the noun form which he limits to discussions of religion (in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*) or

Spinoza (in the *Science of Logic*), in which context he speaks about a recognizable, familiar metaphysical entity." Letter to J. Burbidge dated 4 January, 1996.

13. This use can on occasion be found in Hegel. Thus in the second book of the *Science of Logic* there is a subsection entitled "Absolute Difference." The sense of the discussion is that the concept 'difference' is examined on its own, apart from any relationship to other terms.
14. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A324–6, B381–2.
15. Shortly before his death, I had an opportunity to meet Eric Weil, the distinguished French interpreter of Hegel. I commented that, in my struggle to understand Hegel's *Logic*, I found myself uncomfortable with Hegel's use of the term "absolute." "Oh," replied Weil with a smile, "you are reading too much into it. All that is involved in any absolute moment is the realization that the previous stage is relative. The position from which you made that discovery is absolute, relative to the one now discounted. In other words, absolute is a relative term; it is just what in the circumstances is non-relative."
16. See *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, p. 110; *Phenomenology*, §184, p. 112.
17. I am here moving quickly through the early paragraphs of the chapter. In this case *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, pp. 422–3; *Phenomenology*, §789, p. 480.
18. *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, pp. 423–4; *Phenomenology*, §§790–1, pp. 480–1.
19. *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, p. 424; *Phenomenology*, §792, pp. 481–2.
20. *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, pp. 424–5; *Phenomenology*, §793, p. 482.
21. See *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, p. 353; *Phenomenology*, §656, p. 397f. There are a number of discussions about the specific context Hegel has in mind. George di Giovanni directs our attention to Jacobi's Woldemar. ("Hegel, Jacobi, and 'Crypto-Catholicism' or Hegel in Dialogue with the Enlightenment" in *Hegel and the Modern World*, ed. A. Collins [Albany: SUNY Press, 1995], pp. 53–72.) I have argued that there are strong connections with the Lutheran practice of personal confession. ("Is Hegel a Christian?" in *New Perspectives on Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, ed. D. Kolb [Albany: SUNY Press, 1992], pp. 93–107.)
22. *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, pp. 355–6; *Phenomenology*, §660, p. 401.
23. *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, p. 356; *Phenomenology*, §661, p. 401.
24. *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, pp. 356–7; *Phenomenology*, §662–3, p. 302f.
25. *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, pp. 358–61; *Phenomenology*, §§665–9, pp. 403–70. In these paragraphs we have been expanding on *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, pp. 425–6; *Phenomenology*, §§794–5, pp. 482–4.
26. This citation and the following discussion is taken from *Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, pp. 426–7; *Phenomenology*, §796, pp. 484–5.
27. I have adopted Peirce's term to remind us of the difference of his theory from that of James (and later Dewey).
28. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), v. 5, §400, 402.
29. This paragraph paraphrases the final sentence of §796.
30. See *Collected Papers*, vol. 5, §407.

6 Language and thought

1. Preface to the Second Edition, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, in GW 21, p. 10; *Science of Logic*, p. 31. Translations are my own.
2. *Logik*, in GW 12, p. 130; *Logic*, p. 708.

3. In *The Company of Words: Hegel, Language, and Systematic Philosophy* (Evanston: Northwestern, 1993), John McCumber concentrates on this distinction between the language of ordinary life and the systematic language Hegel uses: "*The final task of Hegelian philosophy, on this analysis, is not to annihilate the disparities between the System and nonphilosophical language, but to state them clearly.* It is in fact the lack of identity between the two which gives Hegel's philosophy its broad comprehensive power." (323) Rather than simply focusing on the discrepancy between the two, I shall here try to find, within Hegel's system, that continuity which binds them together.
The reader's attention is drawn to Chapter 3 of my *On Hegel's Logic* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities, 1981) in which I argue that mutual recognition leads us to refine our use of language so that we develop universal conventions. A version of that chapter can be found in *Method and Speculation in Hegel's Phenomenology*, ed. M. Westphal (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities, 1982) pp. 85–94.
4. I shall use "reference" in quotation marks for what is signified by a sign to retain the language used by Frege's translators, but to indicate that it may have a distinctive sense from the one he employs, since (for Hegel) the sign does not refer to an individual spatio-temporal entity, but to what is common in any synthesis of imagination. On the other hand, I shall use "representation" to translate Hegel's *Vorstellung* (not the "picture thinking" favored by Miller and Wallace) even though Frege's translators have used "idea" for the same German term.
5. Since I am unhappy with the translation "determinate being" for *Dasein*, I shall, wherever possible, use the indefinite "a being" or "beings," distinguishing it from simple "being," which translates *Sein*.
6. It is the subconscious, not the unconscious, which is involved in intelligence. For although the mind is not immediately aware of its content, this latter can be recalled without difficulty. Freud's "unconscious" or "id" is more repressed, and can only become explicit and articulate through the mediation of effective therapy. That is why its workings are potentially more destructive to the workings of reason.
7. One thinks of James Mill.
8. At this point it is worth recalling a clause from the passage cited earlier from the chapter "Objectivity:" "so that one recognizes in the imperceptible transitions between representations what is more closely concerned with the corresponding concept." It is the *transitions* that are related to concepts, not the representations themselves; and this applies equally well to the signs developed by imagination.
9. *Enzyklopädie* §453 Remark, in *GW* 20, p. 446; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 204.
10. For Hume, see the beginning sections of *A Treatise of Human Nature*. I have here been providing an interpretation of the first two parts (on recollection and imagination) of Hegel's discussion of "Representation" found in *Enzyklopädie* §§451–60, in *GW* 20, pp. 445–59; *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 201–18.
11. I now turn to the prior section in Hegel's psychology, on intuition: *Enzyklopädie* §§446–50, in *GW* 20, pp. 442–5; *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 193–201.
12. *Enzyklopädie* §439, in *GW* 20, p. 434; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 178.
13. Note that there are several levels of generality. Initially we connect an immediate impression with similar images recalled from the subconscious to make

a basic representation (or idea). Then we associate diverse representations on the basis of something they share or have in common – a quality, a relation, a peculiar kind of spatial or temporal contiguity and so on.

14. This is Hegel's discussion of memory (to be distinguished from recollection, discussed earlier): *Enzyklopädie* §§461–4, in *GW* 20, pp. 459–63; *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 219–23.
15. At this point I introduce “meaning” as a generic term that can bridge the transition from “reference” to what Frege's translators have called “sense.”
16. Consider the inverted world, discussed in both the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*GW* 9, p. 96; Miller tr., pp. 96–7 §157) and the *Science of Logic* (*GW* 11, p. 350f; Miller tr., pp. 509–11).
17. *Enzyklopädie*, in *GW* 20, pp. 464–5; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 225.
18. *Logik*, in *GW* 21, p. 94; *Logic*, p. 107.
19. *Phänomenologie*, in *GW* 9, p. 35; *Phenomenology*, p. 27. Compare a passage later on in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*: “Science can be organized only through the very life of the concept itself. In that discipline the determinacy, which schematically is attached to the realm of being externally, is the self-moving soul of the enriched content. The movement of what is consists on the one hand of becoming something else and so achieving its immanent content; but on the other it takes this development – this its being – back into itself. That is, it makes itself into a *moment* and simplifies itself into something determinate. In that movement the *negativity* is the distinguishing and positing of a *being*; in this return into itself it [the negativity] is the becoming of *determinate simplicity*.” (in *GW* 9, p. 38; Miller tr., pp. 31–2).
20. *Logik*, in *GW* 21, p. 320; *Logic*, p. 323; compare *Logik* (1812), in *GW* 11, pp. 186–7. In this context the unity that emerges from the reciprocal equilibrium is the concept of measure, under which a quantum is identified with, or applied to, a quality. Double transition is also introduced into the second edition of the *Enzyklopädie* at §241 (in *GW* 19, pp. 179, and 20, pp. 230; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 306).
21. It is worth recalling that for Kant, understanding involves the *act* of integrating a synthesis into a concept. See *Critique of Pure Reason* B 92–4.
22. *Enzyklopädie* §81, in *GW* 20, p. 119; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 128.
23. *Enzyklopädie* §82, in *GW* 20, p. 120; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 131.
24. *Enzyklopädie* §80, in *GW* 20, p. 118; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 125.
25. This is not an entirely new proposal of Hegel's. He is drawing on Kant's “Clue to the Discovery of all pure Concepts of the Understanding” §10, where Kant draws a clear distinction between the syntheses of imagination, which “does not yet yield knowledge,” and *unity*. “To bring this synthesis to *concepts* is a function of the understanding, and it is through this function of the understanding that we first obtain knowledge properly so called.” *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kemp Smith translation) A76–9/B102–5.
26. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 32; *Logic*, 600.
27. This paragraph anticipates our discussion of Hegel's chapter on “Absolute Idea” in the next chapter.
28. *Logik*, in *GW* 21, p. 69; *Logic*, pp. 82–3.
29. This is where Hegel's logic takes its distance from Kant. For Kant only the imagination can produce syntheses; Hegel discovers synthesis in pure thought.
30. *Enzyklopädie* §462, in *GW* 20, p. 459; *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 219.

31. This is why the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is the introduction to the *Science of Logic*. Individual and cultural experience is all incorporated into the knowledge that provides the starting point for pure thought.
32. Cf. *Enzyklopädie* §80.
33. "The idea (*Vorstellung*) is subjective: one man's idea is not that of another. There result, as a matter of course, a variety of differences in the ideas (*Vorstellungen*) associated with the same sense. A painter, a horseman, and a zoologist will probably connect different ideas (*Vorstellungen*) with the name 'Bucephalus.' This constitutes an essential distinction between the idea (*Vorstellung*) and the sign's sense, which may be the common property of many people, and so is not a part or mode of the individual mind." G. Frege, "On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*," in *The Frege Reader*, ed. M. Beaney (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) p. 154.
34. The distinctive synthetic role of imagination is clearer in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* than the second, although (as we have seen) it remains in the chapter on "The Clue to the Discovery of all pure Concepts of the Understanding." In that first edition (which Hegel probably knew best) it also plays a significant part in the "Transcendental Deduction of the Categories."
35. *Phänomenologie*, in *GW* 9, p. 27; *Phenomenology*, pp. 18–19 §32.
36. For a full analysis of this chapter in his *Logic*, see my *Real Process: How Logic and Chemistry Combine in Hegel's Philosophy of Nature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) pp. 27–52.
37. See Aaron J. Hyde, *The Development of Modern Chemistry* (New York: Dover, 1984) p. 94.
38. As the example of elective affinity suggests, however, they can also disappear from that arsenal. For all that we still talk about the "chemistry" of new-found love, the phrase has retreated to being a metaphor more than a genuine concept.

7 Absolute idea

1. This chapter explicates the chapter: "The Absolute Idea" in *Logik*, in *GW* 12, pp. 236–53; *Logic*, 824–44. In the following four chapters we shall have reason to look in more detail at Hegel's discussions of chemism, life, cognition and teleology.
2. Hegel's German term is *sich entlassen*.

8 Chemism and chemistry

1. The original version of this paper did not make the cut for the biennial session of the Hegel Society of America on the Philosophy of Nature. A revised version was then presented at a session of the Society in conjunction with the APA Eastern Division in 1999, and later published as "Chemism and Chemistry," *The Owl of Minerva*, 34(1) (Fall/Winter 2002–3) pp. 1–17.
2. In the *Vorrede zu einer philosophischen Schrift des Herrn Victor Cousin*, 1834, in *Sämtliche Werke*, (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1856–61) Abt. I, Band 10, pp. 212–13.
3. Although a student of Kant, J.B. Richter in *Anfangsgründe der Stöchiometrie; oder Meßkunst chymischer Elemente* (Breslau u. Hirschberg, 1792), did develop

the insights of Proust and others into the quantitative calculation of chemical combinations.

4. Translated by E.E. Harris and P. Heath, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
5. A good example is Euclid's proof of the Pythagorean theorem where a network of triangles and rectangles is constructed within the right-angled triangle and its appended squares.
6. Just as Euclid's proof does not create the truth of the Pythagorean theorem, a construction in the philosophy of nature does not produce the physical reality. It is rather a way of demonstrating the underlying rationality of the phenomena. The validity of the argument was established by the congruence between the results of the construction and the evident structure of experience.
7. This is the text concerning the planets that Karl Popper derides in *The Open Society and its Enemies, Vol II The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx and the Aftermath*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) 27ff. With respect to Hegel's critique of Newton that is expressed in the dissertation, Nasti de Vincentis and Ferrini have shown that not only was Hegel relying on a subtle criticism of Newton's mathematics developed by L. Castel, but also that the criticism was well founded. C. Ferrini, "On Newton's Demonstration of Kepler's Second Law in Hegel's *De Orbitis Planetarum* (1801)," *Philosophia Naturalis*, 31(1) (1994), pp. 150–70; M. Nasti de Vincentis, "Hegel's Worm in Newton's Apple," *Essays on Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature* (Albany: SUNY, 1998) 257–89.
8. The method of construction and proof is outlined in the Logic of 1804–5 under Proportion and applied throughout the Philosophy of Nature. On the former, see G.W.F. Hegel, *The Jena System, 1804–5: Logic and Metaphysics*, ed. J. Burbidge & G. di Giovanni (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986) pp. 109–30. For example: "This bringing back of the division of construction to the unity of definition is proof." (119) The full text is found in GW 7. For the 1805–6 lectures which contain only the Philosophy of Nature and Spirit but no discussion of method, see GW 8. In neither case has the material on the Philosophy of Nature been translated.
9. This point is made explicitly in the first two paragraphs of the *Philosophy of Nature* §§245–6, in GW 20, pp. 235–6; (Miller) pp. 4–7. Teleology does provide the basis for Hegel's discussion of history. On this see Chapter 10.
10. This paragraph is an expansion of §250 in the *Philosophy of Nature*, in GW 20, pp. 239–40; (Miller) pp. 22–3.
11. §246 and Remark, in GW 20, p. 236; (Miller) pp. 6–7.
12. Hegel also discusses chemical terms in the chapter on Measure in the first book of the *Science of Logic*. U. Ruschig (*Hegels Logik und die Chemie: fortlaufender Kommentar zum "realen Mass"* [Bonn: Bouvier, 1997]) has explored the relationship between that section and contemporary chemistry. V. Hösle (*Hegels System: Der Idealismus der Subjektivität und das Problem der Intersubjektivität*, [Hamburg: Meiner, 1987] I, p. 247) and K. Düsing (*Das Problem der Subjektivität in Hegels Logik*, [Bonn: Bouvier, 1976] p. 289f) both question the legitimacy of including a discussion of mechanism and chemism within the logic.
13. I shall be providing an abstract of the more detailed argument developed in *Real Process: How Logic and Chemistry Combine in Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

14. I shall put these terms in single quotes to indicate that we are not here necessarily referring to things which are discerned by chemistry, but to the general logical conception of objects that are oriented toward each other.
15. *Enzyklopädie*, in GW 20, pp. 207–8; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 278.
16. *Logik*, in GW 12, pp. 149–52; *Logic*, pp. 728–31.
17. Oxford Concise Dictionary, 7th edition, 1099. I explore the logic of teleology in Chapter 10.
18. For the purposes of this argument I leave out of consideration the additions to the *Encyclopaedia* which contain material from Hegel's lectures. It is clear from the lectures of 1819–20 (*Naturphilosophie: Band I: Die Vorlesungen von 1819/20*, edited by M. Gies, [Naples: Bibliopolis, 1982] and *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Natur: Berlin 1819–20*, ed. M. Bondeli and H.N. Seelmann [Hamburg: Meiner, 2002]) that Hegel presupposed the systematic framework of the *Encyclopaedia* and did not attempt to reproduce it. Instead, in the lectures he primarily illustrates the core paragraphs with material from contemporary science. In the following discussion, paragraph numbers refer to the 1830 edition of Hegel's *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, found in GW 20, pp. 327–43. English translations are available in my *Real Process*, as well as in *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, whether translated by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) pp. 232–72, or by M.J. Petry (London: Allen & Unwin/New York: Humanities, 1970) Vol. 2, pp. 178–222.
19. The concept of "body" (der Körper) is specific to the philosophy of nature as naming the way matter is particularized. It is thus to be distinguished from "object" (das Objekt, not der Gegenstand) which is the object of conceptual thought, and from "body" (der Leib) which is the embodiment of a living individual.
20. This distinction is drawn in the section on "The determinate ground" (*Der bestimmte Grund*) within the third chapter of the first part of the *Science of Logic's* second book: on Essence: in GW 11, pp. 302–12; *Logic*, pp. 456–66.
21. Recall that in the *Logic* that precedes the *Philosophy of Nature* within the *Encyclopaedia* he had characterized the mediating process of chemism under these three syllogisms.
22. See in the next chapter.

9 Life and biology

1. This chapter started out as "Die Logik des Lebens als Grund der organischen Physik," a paper read at a symposium in Lübeck, Germany in 1993. A much revised version was presented at the meeting of the Hegel Society of Great Britain in 1998 and published as "Hegel's Hat Trick" in the *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, 39/40 (1999) 47–64. It has been adapted further for use here.
2. "Hegel achieved the most miraculous things. A master logician it was child's play for his powerful dialectical method to draw real physical rabbits out of purely metaphysical hats." K.R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies, Vol II The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx and the Aftermath*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963) p. 27.
3. This section of the larger *Logic* was published in 1816, whereas the *Philosophy of Nature* text we shall explore came from the 1830 *Encyclopaedia*. Since the

Encyclopaedia Logic is a cryptic set of theses to be expanded in lectures, it presumes the logical transitions rather than develops them in detail.

4. See Chapter 11.
5. I shall indicate the paragraphs that underlie my reading: *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 182; *Logic*, p. 764: "The Notion of life ..."
6. Hegel often refines what a term means in a specific context by distinguishing it from the way that term has been used earlier in the *Logic*.
7. Notice that 'inhering' and 'subsuming' are two ways subjects and predicates are related in a simple judgment: in "a rose is red," red on the one hand is said to inhere in the rose, but on the other hand the rose is subsumed into the larger class of red things. These two particular relationships acquire a distinctive sense in this setting.
8. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 182; *Logic*, p. 765: "The determinations ..."
9. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 183; *Logic*, p. 765: "In respect of content ..."
10. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 183; *Logic*, p. 765: "This is in the first place ..." and 766: "Now because ..."
11. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 184; *Logic*, p. 767: "This process ..."
12. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 185; *Logic*, p. 767: "Now the Idea ..."
13. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 185; *Logic*, p. 768: "Thus it is ..." It is important to note that sensitivity, irritability and reproduction first occur with regard to the relationships among members of the living individual. Only later are they applied to the interaction of individual and environment.
14. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 185; *Logic*, p. 768: "The second determination ..."
15. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 186; *Logic*, p. 768: "According to this ..."
16. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 186; *Logic*, p. 769: "With reproduction ..." Here again there is an implicit contradiction. The living individual is a singular entity, yet it also functions as one particular among many. Considered simply on their own 'singular' and 'particular' are opposites. So the logic investigates the process within which they can both function as moments.
17. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 187, the cited phrase is found at line 34; *Logic*, p. 769: "The living individual ..." and p. 770: "This process ..."
18. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 188; *Logic*, p. 771 mid-paragraph: "In so far as the object ..."
19. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, pp. 188–9; *Logic*, p. 771: "Now the subject ..." and "With the seizure ..."
20. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 189; *Logic*, p. 772: "The immediate Idea ..." Certainly this is not yet the sense of 'genus' used by the biologists. It is an embryonic sense that has emerged from the previous analysis and now waits to be fleshed out. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1933) defines the logical sense of genus as "a class or kind of things which includes a number of subordinate kinds (called species) as sharing in certain common attributes; a general concept." Genus thus serves logically as the common attribute that the individual continues to embody even through a number of assimilations.
21. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 189; *Logic*, p. 772: "The living individual ..."
22. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 190; *Logic*, p. 773: "But the further ..." and "This universal ..."
23. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 190; *Logic*, p. 773: "Now because ..."
24. Any reality that cancels differences is one of Hegel's negative unities.
25. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 190; *Logic*, p. 773: "The identity with ..."
26. *Logik*, in *GW* 12, p. 191; *Logic*, p. 774: "The reflection ..."

27. *Logik*, in GW 12, p. 191; *Logic*, p. 774: "That is to say ..." This next category is analyzed in Chapter 10.
 28. Hegel calls an infinite regress a "bad" infinite. But like contradictions, such bad infinities are the engine of progress, for one looks, not at the endless series, but the recurring motor that drives them on and identifies their essential character.
 29. On the way in which terms from ordinary language are adopted in the *Logic*, see Chapter 6.
 30. The following discussion is working from *Enzyklopädie* (1830), in GW 20, pp. 344–75; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 273–445.
 31. In the *Phenomenology*, Observing Reason understands the externally observed nervous, muscular and reproductive systems in terms of the inner sensitive, irritable and visceral functions which are their universal principle. (*Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, p. 151; *Phenomenology* §267, p. 161) So the logical distinction between inner and outer is finding expression in this development within the *Philosophy of Nature*.
 32. Compare again the *Phenomenology*: "These properties [i.e. sensibility, irritability and reproduction], at least the first two, seem indeed to refer not to organism in general, but only to the animal organism. As a matter of fact the vegetable organism expresses only the simple concept of the organism, which does not develop its moments." (*Phänomenologie*, in GW 9, p. 15; *Phenomenology* §265, pp. 160–1.)
 33. Already covered in Chapter 8.
 34. The term also appears in four of the Remarks that Hegel appended to paragraphs within this chapter (§358, §359, §368, §373) and in eight of the paragraphs from "Animal Nature" (§352, §353, §354, §360, §362, §366, §368 and §374). In the first seven of this latter eight, "concept" refers, not to concept in general, but to the logical discussion of life in particular, including the basic division into form, assimilation and genus, the moments of sensibility, irritability and reproduction, needs as the basis for assimilation, the realization or objectivity of the concept, and the kinds or genders that differentiate the genus. In §374 the actual animal is seen to be inadequate to this concept. In his Remarks Hegel often compares the empirical phenomena with the conceptual framework. In all of these references, then, he is comparing what is found empirically in the animal realm (the most complete instantiation of the concept) with the logical template we earlier analyzed.
- For those who are using English translations, please note that I am basing my analysis exclusively on the original text of the 1830 *Encyclopaedia*. The lecture material which has been added (the *Zusätze*) must be treated with a grain of salt when we are concerned with the systematic development. Not only are we dependent on the perspicacity of the students taking the notes, but Michelet has collated into one text material from a number of different lecture series ranging from 1805 to 1830. It should also be noted that, at the end of this section, Michelet and Miller work from the 1827 edition, since the changes Hegel introduced in 1830 did not fit with the lecture material they had to hand.
35. J.W. Burbidge, *Real Process: How Logic and Chemistry Combine in Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 185–6.
 36. "Das gleichgültig-bestehende Körperliche ist dadurch nur als Moment der Individualität gesetzt, und der Begriff in der ihm entsprechenden Realität;

die in Einem, aus der Besonderung der unterschiedenen Körperlichkeiten sich hervorbringende concrete Einheit mit sich, welche die Thätigkeit ist, diese ihre einseitige Form der Beziehung auf sich zu negiren, sich in die Momente des Begriffs zu dirimiren und zu besondern und ebenso in jene Einheit zurückzuführen, – so der unendliche sich selbst anfachende und unterhaltende Proceß, – der Organismus." *Enzyklopädie (1830)* §336, in *GW* 20, p. 343; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 270.

37. §337 is a kind of introduction, and as such not part of the systematic development. Hegel is here stepping outside of the strict logical argument and sets the context for the whole section on "Organic Physics." In this more informal setting, he can exploit the universal/particular/singular trichotomy.
38. As Petry points out: "Prior to Pasteur (1822–1895), the concept was used to account for internal parasites, infusoria and bacteria." (*Hegel's Philosophy of Nature*, [London & New York: 1970] III, 244). Petry also cites J.T. Needham, "Observations upon the generation, composition and decomposition of Animal and Vegetable Substances" (London, 1749) and T.A. Knight, "Transactions of the Horticultural Society of London" II, 83 (London, 1818).
39. "Diese Trennung des allgemeinen, such äußerlichen Organismus und dieser nur punktuellen, vorübergehenden Subjectivität hebt sich vermöge der an sich seyende Identität ihres Begriffs zur Existenz dieser Identität, zum belebten Organismus, der an ihr selbst sich gliedernden Subjectivität auf, welche den nur an sich seyenden Organismus, die physische allgemeine und individuelle Natur von sich ausschließt und ihr gegenübertritt, aber zugleich an diesen Mächten die Bedingung ihrer Existenz, die Erregung wie das Material ihres Processes, hat." *Enzyklopädie (1830)* §342, in *GW* 20, p. 347; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 299.
40. "Was aber im Begriffe gesetzt worden is, daß der Proceß die mit sich selbst zusammengegangene Individualität darstellt, und die Theile, die zunächst als Individuen sind, auch als der Vermittlung angehörige und in ihr vorübergehende Momente, somit die unmittelbare Einzelheit und das Außereinander des vegetabilischen Lebens als aufgehoben zeigt. Diß Moment der negativen Bestimmung begründet den Uebergang in den wahrhaften Organismus, worin die äußere Gestaltung mit dem Begriffe übereinstimmt, daß die Theile wesentlich Glieder and die Subjectivität als die durchdringende Eine des Ganzen existiert." *Enzyklopädie (1830)* §349, in *GW* 20, p. 352; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 350.
41. In addition to the term *Begriff*, Hegel in each of the paragraphs we have been discussing stresses unity (*Eine, Einheit*) and exploits his *Lieblingskind*: "aufheben." This reinforces the point we have been making that conceptual thought transforms the synthesis of the previous moments into an integrated unity.
42. "Aber diese erreichte Identität mit dem Allgemeinen ist das Aufheben des formellen Gegensatzes, der unmittelbaren Einzelheit und der Allgemeinheit der Individualität, und diß nur die eine und zwar die abstracte Seite, der Tod des Natürlichen. Die Subjectivität ist aber in der Idee des Lebens der Begriff, sie ist so an sich das absolute Insichseyn der Wirklichkeit und die concrete Allgemeinheit; durch das aufgezeigte Aufheben der Unmittelbarkeit ihrer Realität ist sie mit sich selbst zusammengegangen; das letzte Außersichseyn der Natur ist aufgehoben, und der in ihr nur an sich seyende Begriff ist damit für sich geworden. – Die Natur ist damit in ihrer Wahrheit übergegangen, in

die Subjectivität des Begriffs, deren Objectivität selbst die aufgehobene Unmittelbarkeit der Einzelheit, die concrete Allgemeinheit ist, so dass der Begriff gesetzt ist, welcher die ihm entsprechende Realität zu seinem Daseyn hat, – der Geist." *Enzyklopädie* (1830) §376, in GW 20, p. 375; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 442–3.

One has to move past the introductory discussions of the *Philosophy of Spirit* to §388 to get to the next step in the systematic development. The first stage of spirit draws itself into itself out of the externality of nature and is simply the soul that was identified early on in the logic of life.

10 Cognition and psychology

1. This is a translation of "Das Erkennen und der endliche Geist," which was presented at a colloquium in Tübingen, Germany in 2001 and later published in *Der Begriff als die Wahrheit: Zum Anspruch der Hegelschen "Subjektiven Logik,"* edited by A.F. Koch, A. Oberauer and K. Utz (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003) pp. 211–21; more recently the English version was read at a colloquium at the Cardozo Law School in 2004 and later published as "Cognition and Finite Spirit" in *Hegel's Theory of the Subject*, ed. D.G. Carlson, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) pp. 175–86 and is reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.
2. *Logik*, in GW 12, p. 198; *Logic*, p. 782.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Enzyklopädie* (1830) §378, in GW 20, pp. 379–80; *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 2–3.
5. *Enzyklopädie* (1830) §82, in GW 20, p. 120; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 131.
6. *Enzyklopädie* (1830) §222, in GW 20, p. 221; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 294.
7. *Philosophy of Spirit*, §381, Addition (from student lecture notes) cited from M.J. Petry, *Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978) I, p. 46; compare *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 14.
8. *Logik*, in GW 12, p. 236; *Logic*, p. 824, my italics. For the way in which the chapter on "the Absolute Idea" develops from this initial statement, see Chapter 7.
9. *Enzyklopädie* (1830) §§79–82, in GW 20, pp. 118–20; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, pp. 125–33.
10. We have already had occasion to discuss material from this section of Hegel's *Philosophy of Spirit* in Chapter 6. Here we shall be focusing on the relation between system and empirical data. The reader is directed to *Enzyklopädie* (1830) §§438–82, in GW 20, pp. 433–77; *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 178–240.
11. *Enzyklopädie* (1830) §444 Anm., in GW 20, p. 439; *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 186–7.
12. *Enzyklopädie* (1830) §442 Anm., in GW 20, pp. 436–7; *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 183–4.
13. *Enzyklopädie* (1830) §249, in GW 20, p. 239; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 20.

11 Teleology and history

1. This chapter started as a lecture given at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. in the fall of 1992, later published as "The Cunning of Reason," in *Final Causality in Nature and Human Affairs*, ed. R.F. Hassing, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1997) 151–62.
2. In Chapter 1.

3. *Enzyklopädie* (1830) §209, in GW 20, p. 213; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, p. 284. As far as I can determine, the phrase “cunning of reason” is peculiar to this section of the *Logic*, first appearing in 1816, and reappearing in all three editions of the *Encyclopaedia*. The only other appearance is in the lecture notes of students in the Philosophy of History. (As yet we cannot determine in which particular lecture series it was used.) In 1831, however, Hegel introduced into his logical discussion of Measure an interesting comment: “To the extent that it is taken as an indifferent limit, quantum is the side with respect to which a being lies open to unsuspected attack and thoroughly condemned. It is the *cunning* of the concept to grasp onto this side, from which its quality does not seem to come into play – and indeed so much so that the aggrandizement of a state or of a fortune, etc., which leads finally to disaster for the state or for the owner, even appears at first to be their good fortune.” *Logik*, in GW 21, p. 332; *Logic*, p. 336. This passage would appear to have benefited from Hegel’s use of the phrase in the lectures on world history. In all places where Hegel used the term “cunning” with “reason,” he underlines it.
4. For the source of this outline, the reader is referred to *Logik*, in GW 12, pp. 154–78; *Logic*, pp. 734–54.
5. That last paragraph hides a whole network of puns in Hegel’s text. A syllogism, or mediated inference, is a *Schluss*; the process of mediating involves resolution (or *Entschluss*), exclusion (or *Ausschluss*) and disclosure (or *Aufschluss*). As is his wont, Hegel is delighting in making philosophy speak German.
6. The logic of “life” has been developed in Chapter 9.
7. *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, tr. H.B. Nisbet, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) p. 89; G.W.F. Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. J. Hoffmeister, (Hamburg: Meiner, 1955) p. 105.
8. See Chapter 1. The only exception to this statement is in §158 of the 1817 *Enzyklopädie* (in GW 13, p. 96). It had been used in the more extended discussion of the larger *Logic*, a year earlier. The fact that it was explicitly reinserted as one of the few amendments to this paragraph in 1827 suggests that the conjunction of the two concepts had become firmer in Hegel’s mind through his lectures. Not only did that happen in his lectures on world history, but the material from the lectures added to Paragraph 245 of the *Philosophy of Nature* (see p. 5) uses the verb *abreiben* when talking about our normal practical use of nature for our own finite ends. It is one of those key terms for understanding what Hegel has in mind when he talks about final cause.
9. See Chapter 7.
10. In the *Phenomenology* and earlier Hegel analyzes this process as the dynamic of recognition. See Robert R. Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991).

12 Absolute spirit

1. *Enzyklopädie* (1830) §§553–77, in GW 20, pp. 542–75; *Philosophy of Mind*, pp. 292–315.
2. See Chapter 7.
3. *Enzyklopädie* (1817) §474, in GW 13, p. 246; *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writings*, ed. E. Behler (New York: Continuum, 1990) p. 263; compare *Philosophy of Mind* §574, pp. 313–4.

4. The Critical Edition of the 1817 *Encyclopaedia* includes manuscript notes written by Hegel on blank pages bound into his personal copy. They appear to have been used for his lectures on the *Encyclopaedia* in the summer semester of 1818 (in Heidelberg), the winter semester of 1818–19 (in Berlin), and again for the winter semester of 1826–7. Since these may be of interest, I shall provide a translation of those related to each paragraph: to §475 (§575 in 1830) “*Nature* the mediating; the abstract otherness, As self-sublating – finitude – out of which the spirit reflects itself into itself and sets itself identical with the logical – fulfillment – [the] becoming concrete of the logical / *Extreme finite abstraction* syllogism out of the being of the other towards the other – But transition the main point.” GW 13, pp. 538–9.
5. A detailed discussion of the various forms of syllogism, as Hegel understood them, can be found in *On Hegel's Logic* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities, 1981) pp. 158–92; *The Logic of Hegel's Logic* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2006) gives a briefer outline.
6. After all, nature is not identical with the philosophy of nature, nor is spirit with the philosophy of spirit.
7. Hegel's manuscript notes here are important: “§476. Second syllogism – appearance – activity but subjective activity / activity – Subjective activity, in knowing – / Subjective cognition – that it is singular individuals who philosophize. The sequential order of the philosophical content belongs to this appearance – spirit is in *one*, soul, consciousness, spirit – intelligence and will – mints 1000 connections – result itself the immediate unity of this substantiality – arbitrary will to externalize itself in this way: *of being there* – memory, understanding – reason – not individualized, moment – member, only as subsisting in this its substance can it *be there* – i.e. determine itself. – Subjective cognition that nonetheless has for its content the Idea, as it is in and of itself. / activity moment is at the same time in the content, its dialectic.” GW 13, p. 539.
8. Hegel's notes: “Totality Knowing that is not subjective – rather abstracted from its particularity – becoming absorbed in the subject matter itself – so that the universal works in me – As in the work of art – difficulty of philosophy is just this power – of freeing oneself, other goals, representations – of holding off the momentary contingent, temporal of representation / Idea in both its moments – impersonal *abstract* reason as infinite intuition – So I stop being I – i.e. Selfconsciousness subjective thinking – nature – subjective knowing – spirit – philosophy cancels and transcends even its subjectivity, i.e. Cognizes the diremption of its idea into these 2 extremes / picture of the rational world-view by conceiving the same – All 3 standpoints are united in one (a) it is the nature of the matter in itself that moves itself forward (b) movement activity of cognition (c) just thereby neither subjective or objective – but the *One idea* which presents itself and in its development through *particular* spheres equally moment, this One idea is overview –” GW 13, pp. 539, 541, 543.
9. James Russell Lowell, “Once to every man and nation.”

13 “Building the world as it ought to be”

1. The first pages of this chapter are drawn from a paper presented to the Hegelians of Ontario and Quebec at the University of Guelph in 2003, the second part

- was originally read at the Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology, University of Toronto, in 1994 and later at a colloquium in Lübeck, Germany, in 1998 from where it was published as "Hegel und die Chemie," in *Hegel und die Lebenswissenschaften*, ed. O. Breidbach and D. von Engelhardt, (Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 2000) pp. 43–54.
2. *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* [GPR], pagination of original edition, pp. xxiii–xxiv; *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, tr. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon, 1942) p. 13. This work has not yet appeared in the Critical Edition.
 3. *GPR*, pp. xxi–xxii; *Philosophy of Right*, p. 11.
 4. To this extent his position would fit with the contemporary constitution in the United States of America.
 5. Compare Jacques D'Hondt's comment in *Hegel in his Time* (Peterborough: Broadview, 1988) pp. 97–8.
 6. See Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, II, 5th edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966) pp. 27–9. Apparently Ceres is no longer classed as a full-fledged planet, and even the more recently discovered Pluto is in jeopardy.
 7. At the time of his dissertation, Hegel was in Jena a protégé of Schelling. (See above in Chapter 8) As we have seen he abandoned the method of construction and proof in the *Science of Logic* and the *Encyclopaedia*. C. Ferrini, in "Framing Hypotheses: Numbers in Nature and the Logic of Measure in the Development of Hegel's System," *Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature*, ed. S. Houlgate (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998) pp. 283–310, shows that Hegel's later treatment of the *Dissertation* in the second and third editions of the *Encyclopaedia* is more complicated than suggested here.
 8. H.S. Harris, *Hegel's Development: Night Thoughts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) pp. 95–6.
 9. See *Enzyklopädie* §334 Remark, in *GW* 20, pp. 340–1; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 265–6.
 10. *Enzyklopädie* §330, Remark, in *GW* 20, pp. 331–6; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 245–50. *Logik*, in *GW* 21, pp. 354–63; *Logic*, pp. 356–66.
 11. This was not the way the term was used by Berzelius, who classified non-metallic elements such as sulphur, phosphorous and carbon thereby.
 12. The first two were discovered in 1804, the third in 1803. See in *GW* 8, p. 96; compare *Philosophy of Nature* Addition to §330, pp. 251–2.
 13. W. Whewell, *History of the Inductive Sciences* (according to the third edition of 1857) (London: Cass, 1967) iii, p. 125.
 14. *Logik*, in *GW* 21, pp. 347–8; *Logic*, pp. 349–51.
 15. *Logik*, in *GW* 21, pp. 362–3; *Logic*, 365–6.
 16. J.J. Berzelius, *Essai sur la théorie des proportions chimiques et sur l'influence chimique de l'électricité*, translated from Swedish (Paris, 1819) pp. 20–1.
 17. *Logik*, in *GW* 21, pp. 358–9; *Logic*, pp. 360–1.
 18. G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen* 16, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Natur: Berlin 1819/20*, ed. M. Bondeli and H.N. Seelmann, (Hamburg: Meiner, 2002) pp. 132–3; compare *Philosophy of Nature* Addition to §333, pp. 263–4.
 19. J.R. Partington cites the details of Ritter's theory in his *A History of Chemistry*, (London: Macmillan, 1962) IV, p. 21. Pohl himself simply talks of water being changed into one or other of the gases.
 20. It is worth noting that Whewell, in his *History of the Inductive Sciences* of 1837, also pointed out "that some of the most important parts of Davy's

results struck his followers as extraordinary paradoxes;—for instance, the fact that the decomposed elements are transferred from one part of the circuit to another, in a form which escapes the cognizance of our senses, through intervening substances for which they have a strong affinity.” Cited from the 3rd edition of 1857, iii, p. 140.

21. *Enzyklopädie*, §330 Remark, in GW 20, p. 334; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 248–9.
22. Comment on Aristotle’s *Philosophy of Nature* found in *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Glockner edition, (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1927–40) xviii, p. 340. This particular passage was omitted from Haldane and Simpson’s translation.
23. *Enzyklopädie* §334 Remark, in GW 20, p. 341; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 266.
24. A paraphrase from Hegel’s comment on Aristotle in *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Glockner edition, xviii, p. 340. Again this cannot be found in the traditional English translation.

14 Philosophy after Hegel

1. *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, ed. W. Jaeschke (Hamburg: Meniner, 1983–85); translated by R.F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson and J.M. Stewart (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984–7).
2. David Kolb has drawn attention to the changes made in the Doctrine of Essence in a paper “The Necessities of Hegel’s Logic,” presented at a meeting of some Hegelians from Ontario and Quebec in Montreal, April 2006. See also my *The Logic of Hegel’s Logic* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2006) Chapter 17, and *Real Process* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) Chapters 10, 16 and 29.
3. See *Logic*, in GW 11, pp. 314–22; *Logic*, 469–78.
4. Compare the analysis of the 1813 version of this chapter in Chapter 2 above.
5. *Enzyklopädie* (1827) §§148–9, in GW 19, pp. 128–30; *Enzyklopädie* (1830) §§148–9, in GW 20, pp. 168–9; *Encyclopaedia Logic*, pp. 224–5. Interestingly enough, F.A. Good’s manuscript from the Heidelberg Lectures on *Logic and Metaphysics* from 1817 report that Hegel used *Sache* in the same context, even though the term had not appeared in the 1817 *Encyclopaedia* on which the lectures were based. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über Logik und Metaphysik*, ed. K. Gloy, *Vorlesungen* 11 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1992) p. 132. He does the same in the same place when lecturing on the *Logic* in 1831. See also G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Logik* (Karl Hegel transcript) ed. U. Rameil, *Vorlesungen* 10 (Hamburg: Meiner, 2001).
6. Hegel does not remain consistent in his use of *die Sache* in his other texts. In the *Phenomenology* (as in the 1813 *Logic*) it is the essential category that integrates the diversity of intention, act and result within sincere action. (*Phänomenologie* in GW 9, pp. 223–8; *Phenomenology*, pp. 246–52. In the *Philosophy of Right*, however, it names whatever is appropriated by the will which, as property, becomes the matter of contracts. (*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* §§54–81, original pagination 57–87; *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, tr. Knox, pp. 46–74.)
7. The balance of this chapter is derived from “New Directions in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature*,” in *Hegel: New Directions*, ed. K. Deligiorgi (Chesham: Acumen, 2006), pp. 177–92.
8. See §249 in the *Encyclopaedia Philosophy of Nature*.
9. His term in both texts is *sich entlassen*.

10. See the discussions in Chapters 8 and 9.
11. Stephen Houlgate, "Logic and Nature in Hegel's Philosophy: A Response to John W. Burbidge," *The Owl of Minerva*, 34(1) (2002–3), p. 115. Houlgate is referring to page 104 of *Vorlesung über Naturphilosophie. Berlin 1823/24*, (Griesheim Nachschrift), ed. Marmasse (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000).
12. Hegel's term is not 'other' but 'negative.'
13. Houlgate, 'Logic and Nature,' p. 119. To be sure Houlgate thinks that he is thereby defending the *a priori* character of the logic of nature, but his use of the empirical terms 'space' and 'time' give lie to his assumption.
14. *Enzyklopädie* (1830) §257, in GW 20, p. 247; *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 33–4. The passage reads: "Negativity, as point, relates itself to space, in which it develops its determinations as line and plane; but in the sphere of self-externality, negativity is equally *for itself* and so are its determinations; but at the same time, these are posited in the sphere of self-externality, and negativity, in so doing, appears as indifferent to the inert side-by-sidedness of space. Negativity, thus posited for itself, is Time."
15. Hegel was quite prepared to resist scientific developments if they did not fit his theories, however. See Chapter 13.
16. *Enzyklopädie* (1830) §249, in GW 20, pp. 238–9; *Philosophy of Nature*, p. 20.
17. Ibid. Remark and Addition from the lectures. For the latter, see *Philosophy of Nature*, pp. 20–2. The Philosophy of Nature to which he refers is that espoused by Schelling and his associates.
18. See Chapter 10.
19. Morton O. Beckner, "Darwinism," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967) I, pp. 297–8, my italics.
20. Another place where negativity enters into evolution is in the area of mass extinctions. Paleontologists have identified a number of such occurrences over geological time, and after each one there is a flourishing of new genera and new species. "Along comes a mass extinction, with its 'differential rules' for survival. Under the new regulations, the very best of your traits, the source of your previous flourishing, may now be your death knell. A trait with no previous significance, one that has just hitchhiked along for the developmental ride as a side consequence of another adaption, may hold the key to your survival." Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life* (New York: Norton, 1989) p. 307.
21. This is what Stephen Jay Gould, in his book on the Burgess Shale, *Wonderful Life*, suggests has happened to the traditional model of evolutionary theory.
22. Mind-boggling is the way Hegel brings extensive contemporary information into his lectures: not only on nature and psychology, but also on politics, history, art and religion.
23. We have already noticed this in the recessive genes that lie dormant until a change in the environment makes them significant.
24. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, tr. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) p. 89.
25. *Logik*, in GW 21, p. 34; *Logic*, 50.
26. On abrasion, see Chapter 1.

15 Conclusion

1. *Logik*, in GW 21, p. 38; *Logic*, p. 54.

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